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The Nation.

August 3/10, 1985 $1.25; U.K. 65p

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EDITORIAL

NO RULES OF THE GAME

Last week the Joint Chiefs of Staff recommended against U.S. ratification of internationally agreed upon revisions of the 1949 Geneva Conventions on treatment of combatants and war victims. This is the latest in a series of Administration repudiations of treaty commitments negotiated over a long period of time with broad bipartisan support.

Reagan began his term by making aid to poor countries contingent on their pro-U.S. votes in the United Nations; he authorized the U.S. withdrawal from Unesco; he refused to approve the Law of the Sea Treaty; he rejected the World Court's right to adjudicate Nicaragua's claims against the United States; and he assailed a series of arms control agreements, including the SALT II treaty.

Critics of the revisions of Treaty Protocols I and II, as they are called, contend that they would legitimize national liberation movements and terrorist organizations by granting their members combatant and prisoner-of-war status. In fact, the fundamental premise of the controversial Protocol I is that members of national liberation movements will assume international duties in exchange for international rights during wartime.

Until the Reagan Administration came along, the United States prided itself on being the foremost exponent of the concept of international law. That commitment has been a fragile one but an important contrast to this country's international misadventures. Reagan's address to the American Bar Association, in which he invoked international law only to eschew it, and the recommendation of his Joint Chiefs suggest that our longstanding commitment to the peaceful resolution of international disputes has been further eroded by a militarist concept of foreign policy.

TERRORISM
Christopher Hitchens

TWENTIETH ANNIVERSARY
Calvin Trillin

REAGAN'S TAX 'REFORM'
Bernard D. Nossiter

'MOMENT ... FORE'
... Langer

ASSAULT ON BLACK VOTERS
Allen Tullos

PRIMO LEVI
Ann Snitow

THE SMITHS
Frank Rose

REFLECTIONS ON THE BOMB

OF ACCIDENTAL JUDGMENTS AND CASUAL SLAUGHTERS

KAI ERIKSON

The bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, which took place forty years ago this month, are among the most thoroughly studied moments on human record. Together they constitute the only occasion in history when atomic weapons were dropped on living populations, and together they constitute the only occasion in history when a decision was made to employ them in that way.

I want to reflect here on the second of those points. The "decision to drop"—I will explain in a minute why quotation marks are useful here—is a fascinating historical episode. But it is also an exhibit of the most profound importance as we consider our prospects for the future. It is a case history well worth attending to. A compelling parable.

If one were to tell the story of that decision as historians normally do, the details arranged in an ordered narrative, one might begin in 1938 with the discovery of nuclear fission, or perhaps a year later with the delivery of Einstein's famous letter to President Roosevelt. No matter what its opening scene, though, the tale would then proceed along a string of events—a sequence of appointees named, committees formed, reports issued, orders signed, arguments won and lost, minds made up and changed—all of it coming to an end with a pair of tremendous blasts in the soft morning air over Japan.

The difficulty with that way of relating the story, as historians of the period all testify, is

(*Continued on Page 80*)

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LETTERS.

NO CENTER IN EL SALVADOR

New York City

The attack on four U.S. marines brought El Salvador back to the front pages after months of what Alexander Cockburn called "collective internal censorship," through which the press has ignored the "most ferocious aerial war ever seen in the Americas" ["Beat the Devil," June 1].

The Nation is to be commended for its coverage of El Salvador. It stands almost alone in understanding that the latest incident marks an escalation rather than "desperation," and in reporting the action in the context of "Vietnam-style terror bombing of peasant villages and army attacks on civilians" [editorial, "Salvador Heats Up," July 6/13]. However, the description of the F.M.L.N. as a "guerrilla free-for-all" takes discussion of the killings out of that context and into the Reagan Administration's world of terrorism.

Three points need clarification. First, the editorial claims the leaders of the F.M.L.N. have been "unable to coordinate the tactics of their constituent parties," a theme which echoes Michael Massing's account of divisions in the Sandinista government ["Hard Questions on Nicaragua," April 6]. On the contrary, the action in Zona Rosa fits directly into the strategy articulated by rebel commander Joaquín Villalobos: small-scale attacks as part of the F.M.L.N.'s war of attrition against the United States.

The five F.M.L.N. commanders signed a joint policy statement endorsing the action, which was also supported by F.D.R. leader Ruben Zamora, despite rumors of a split within the F.D.R. on the issue. The understanding of the principal role that U.S. intervention plays extends well beyond the F.M.L.N./F.D.R. Innocent families subject to daily bombardment know the United States is behind the attacks. In the May Day demonstration in San Salvador, thousands marched through the streets chanting, "Yankee Invaders—Out of El Salvador!" A clearer sense of the level of coordination within the F.M.L.N. can be drawn from the success of the rebel Rafael Arce Zablah brigade in military operations in both the far eastern and far western portions of the country.

Second, we were surprised to read that "many radicals hoped" the election of José Napoleón Duarte would lead to meaningful negotiations. On the contrary, radicals have always stressed that Duarte functions as a fig leaf for the military and the oligarchy. Human rights abuses are on the rise, death squad leaders remain unpunished and the bombing continues. All the while, Duarte has succeeded in drawing more and more U.S. aid. In the past year, the size of El Salvador's helicopter fleet has doubled, the number of counterinsurgency jets has tripled, AC-47 gunships have been introduced and the role of U.S. personnel has been expanded.

Third, Archbishop Arturo Rivera y Damas's equation of the cafe shooting with the bombing and attacks by the army tries to balance two fundamentally unequal things. The U.S. escalation in the form of sophisticated weaponry—sometimes operated in combat by U.S. personnel—has brought thousands of casualties. Comparing that aggression to the defense against it represents a search for a political center in El Salvador that simply does not exist.

Deborah Mutnick
Joel Lefkowitz
CISPES Alert!

A RESOUNDING DEFEAT

New York City

The editorial by Jack Metzgar and Andrew Banks, in which they describe the Air Line Pilots Association's strike against United Airlines as a "victory [which] could have the same kind of symbolic and educational value for the American labor movement that the PATCO debacle has had for management," is both distorted and distressingly naïve ["The United Strike," June 29].

After ALPA struck United in a dispute over a two-tier wage plan, it accepted just such a plan, reducing new employees' salaries by as much as 50 percent for the first five years. It also agreed to arbitrate the salaries that would be paid those employees after five years of employment.

Despite this substantial and degrading concession, United refused to restore the strikers to their rightful place on the seniority list, while granting superseniority to the scab pilots. United also refused to agree to refrain from punishing the flight attendants, pilot trainees and managing flight instructors who respected ALPA's picket lines. Only after the Association of Flight Attendants relieved ALPA of its commitment to protect A.F.A. members did ALPA finally agree that all the back-to-work issues should be submitted for arbitration to a Federal judge. That agreement constitutes a dangerous precedent not only for ALPA but for all the unions in the airline field, and constitutes a clear and present danger for all of labor.

It is true that ALPA did a magnificent and imaginative job in both strike preparation and execution. The labor movement could learn some lessons in the use of the technology employed by ALPA (although very expensive and beyond the financial ability of most union locals) and in its solidarity, which ultimately defeated United's attempt to break the union. However, the settlement could hardly be characterized as "a tremendous success." On the contrary, the principle of collective bargaining and the right to strike both received a resounding defeat.

I. Philip Sipser

METZGAR AND BANKS REPLY

Miami

I. Philip Sipser misses our point partly because an important section of our manuscript was edited out and partly because he represents a point of view that is distressingly naïve about the present and future of the labor movement. Five years ago we probably would have agreed with Sipser that ALPA's agreement with United represented a step back for the labor movement. Now, however, it represents the solid victory of a union over one of management's new and most devastating weapons, the strike.

Everywhere one looks, organized labor is either on the run or extinct. Since the PATCO massacre, managements have used the strike as their most effective tool to crush unions, and many unions have been forced to focus on one issue only, survival. Brown & Sharpe, Continental Airlines, Phelps Dodge—the list gets longer every day.

In the airlines, the situation is worse than in most other industries: two-tier wage systems are the industry standard (with the United pilots' agreement representing one of the least objectionable examples). It is sad but true when we state that the United strike was a major victory, especially for airline unions, because the union was not crushed.

What we find most painful is that the public and even those closest and most sympathetic to labor don't seem to understand how dangerous the situation is. We feel ALPA has at least temporarily shifted the momentum in the airline industry to labor. By sticking together and maintaining solid grass-roots communications among their scattered membership, ALPA was able to turn back one of the best-financed union-busting campaigns in labor history. Yes, we call that a victory.

Jack Metzgar
Andrew Banks

AMPLIFICATION

In his July 20/27 article on the Gouzenko affair, "The Documents That Weren't There," William A. Reuben refers to six reels of microfilm as representing the totality of documents released by the Canadian government. We are now informed by Danny Moore, chief of public service of the Public Archives of Canada, of the existence of an additional six reels of microfilm. Apparently in forwarding the materials to Reuben on an interlibrary loan, the New York Public Library did not tell him that there were additional materials. They are now being made available to Reuben and, if warranted, a follow-up will appear in a future issue.

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EDITORIALS.

Icons of Summer

The gods must be crazier than usual this summer, for they have given America an array of icons, a supply of myths and a set of contradictory commandments that serve mainly to create more frenzy in an already frazzled season. Rambo and revenge, Madonna and the material world, Live Aid, Classic Coke and the Big C: the metaphors leap from reality and mock whatever sense of proportion survives in this Reagan-ravaged land.

Rambo is the cartoon that captured the collective conscience, inspiring flights of Presidential fantasy, Congressional legislation and, for all we know, Pentagon policy. The Rambo legend appears to be the subtext for the House version of the foreign aid bill, a sort of declaration of war against everyone in the Third World who is darker, smaller and more rebellious than Tip O'Neill. Largely the work of Democrats eager to prove their machismo in the Gipper's

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locker room, the bill is oblivious to every lesson about the arrogance of power and the limitations of empire painfully learned since Vietnam. And even that is not enough for Reagan, who prefers to go back even further in history, to the time when Teddy Roosevelt swung his bully club.

While the nation was transfixed by the details of the President's surgery, the Administration moved to prepare for a show of force in whatever corner of the world an opportunity next arises. The pretext will be an attack, real or contrived, against an American soldier, a consular outpost, an airplane or perhaps only the flag. If there's trouble in Central America, the State Department promises to blame Nicaragua and move in for the kill. Elsewhere, the target may be Libya, Iran or Angola. Rambo wants blood, and any shade of red will do.

In the meantime, millions of Americans could express their concern for the wretched of the earth by tuning in to a TV rock concert and dialing their dollars on an 800 number. Live Aid marked the end of the long process of co-optation by which the radical culture of the 1960s was subsumed into the material mainstream. Woodstock may have been a mess—dirty and druggy and wet—but for its generation it represented a necessary commitment to opposition. Live Aid was a show of obedience and a demonstration of the easiest way out of a moral swamp of privilege. Its answer to hunger, exploitation and oppression was charity, not change—and small potatoes at that. Like so much this year, it was a phenomenon of ending, not beginning.

It is remarkable how thoroughly the Reagan revolution has been able to close the avenues of opposition, reverse the direction of change and limit the chances for choice and experimentation in personal behavior and social action. Rollback is the order of the day when the Justice Department asks the Supreme Court to reconsider its 1973 decision legalizing abortion, when the White House insists that Congress pass a budget gutting the structure of the beneficent state, when the Administration redoubles its assault on civil rights law. Congress's refusal to let Reagan promote William Bradford Reynolds was one of the few victories at the national level this year, but a consequence of that triumph is Reynolds's continued tenure as Assistant Attorney General for Civil Rights, in which capacity he will pursue the very policies for which he was rebuked.

Small efforts like the Senate vote against Reynolds and the first House vote against aid to the Nicaraguan *contras* seem to sap so much energy from liberal forces that they rush to retreat before the next shots are fired. The Democrats appear tired and fearful, more willing to emulate Republican reaction than move forward on their own. The Democratic National Committee has already cracked down on independent caucuses in the party, such as those of women and gays, on the theory that anything that looks like a rainbow must be radical and therefore is unacceptable. House Democrats who used to squawk when authorization or appropriation bills for new weapons were debated now acquiesce with hardly a peep. Only the details of the systems of mass murder are discussed; the framework of Reagan's militarism is unquestioned.

So we are left to worry about Madonna's housing problems in New York City, the relative merits of new and old Coca-Cola and the size of Sly Stallone's latissimi dorsi. The real problems are so far away: in history, like the atomic dawn; or in geography, like the wars in Central America and southern Africa. But summer will not last forever, and sooner or later the battles must begin closer to home.

SUMMER SCHEDULE

Don't blame the post office for missing copies of *The Nation*. We began our biweekly summer schedule with the issue of July 6/13. Our next issue will bear the date August 17/24. We resume weekly publication after Labor Day.

Herbert G. Gutman

Herbert G. Gutman, who died on July 21 at the age of 57, was a man of the left as well as a historian. Gutman's place in the professional pantheon is secure. A pioneer of the new social history—best known for the collection of essays *Work, Culture and Society in Industrialized America* and for the groundbreaking study *The Black Family in Slavery and Freedom, 1750–1925*—Gutman also introduced the work of a number of European historians to scholars in this country. He inspired and nurtured hundreds of students.

Beyond that, Herbert Gutman was committed to democratic education. For that reason, he stayed at the Graduate Center of the City University of New York, where he had been Distinguished Professor of History since 1975, and championed community colleges. He thought that history's audience should include more than historians and, in particular, that people whose history had been denied to them deserved to find out about it. To that end, he sponsored the American Social History Project at the Graduate Center, which has been producing films, slide shows and a textbook that puts working-class Americans at the center of our history.

At a time when some historians on the left had ceded empirical research to quantifiers and taken refuge in theory, Gutman demonstrated that it was possible to find data to answer the questions that really mattered. He uncovered sources that shed light on how people live and how they make their own history. When he died he was working on a study of the working class in the Gilded Age, using census data from fifty cities. Gutman aimed to show that in the years after the Civil War, immigrants became workers and native-born Americans became managers. His work would have led to a reinterpretation of how much social mobility there was in Gilded Age America, and perhaps to a new explanation of the making of the middle and working classes.

But empirical studies, in Gutman's view, were not enough. He worried that social history was becoming

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balkanized by scholars turning out monographs in women's, black, urban, working-class and ethnic history without regard to what the fresh information reveals about the larger shape of American history. Writing in *The Nation*, he called for a synthesis "that incorporates and then transcends the new history" ["Whatever Happened to History?" November 21, 1981], and he suggested that "we might move in that direction by asking historians a simple question: In what ways (if any) does our new understanding of black history, working-class history or women's history . . . alter our understanding of American history?" Only by asking that question, Herbert Gutman believed, could scholars on the left offer an alternative vision of our history that all Americans could understand, recognize and eventually act on.

Young Hostages

Until last month, Jeremy, Tamara and Jonathan Manning—ages 11, 5 and 3, respectively—were hostages. They are the children of Thomas and Carol Manning, who had been underground for ten years until their arrest on April 24. The two are accused of being members of the United Freedom Front, which allegedly bombed I.B.M., Motorola and other targets linked to South Africa; Thomas is also accused of killing a New Jersey State Trooper.

For nearly two months after the children were taken into custody in an F.B.I. raid on their parents' house in Norfolk, Virginia, none of their relatives or their attorneys were allowed to see them, speak with them or even learn where they were being held. Juvenile-detention authorities turned away not only Thomas Manning's sister Mary and her husband, Cameron Bishop, themselves political radicals, but also Carol's sister, a Pennsylvania housewife, and Thomas's brother, a religious lay worker from New Mexico.

After the arrest, Jeremy, Tamara and Jonathan were held at an undisclosed "shelter home" in Norfolk and allowed only one monitored phone call to each of their parents in jail. Meanwhile, 11-year-old Jeremy was questioned by both the F.B.I. and the New Jersey State Police, without an attorney or family member present. The last time Carol Manning saw Jeremy, at the F.B.I. office on the day of her arrest, he told her, "They're asking me all sorts of questions. Who our friends were; where we lived." Then he burst out crying.

Reached in Norfolk, F.B.I. media coordinator James Waldrop "can't comment" on the questioning. New Jersey State Police Lieutenant Thomas Gallagher admits that Jeremy was questioned but says that's not improper in the case of a "potential witness." Asked about the right to counsel, Norfolk Deputy City Attorney Dan Hagemeister, who was in charge of the custody case, wonders, "Do we really need a bunch of lawyers saying 'Don't answer that' to an 11-year-old?"

Hagemeister justifies the denial of family visitation rights by saying the children were raised "on the lam" and don't know their relatives: there is no "pre-existing emotional bonding." Besides, he says, "We're dealing with committed revolutionaries here"; then adds, "But I'm not saying it's political. I'm talking about the potential for violence."

After several unsuccessful legal initiatives, Thomas and Carol Manning began hunger strikes demanding their children's release. At a press conference in Norfolk on May 17, attorney William Kunstler read a statement signed by him and former U.S. Attorney General Ramsey Clark denouncing the use of children against their parents. "The sole purpose of holding these kids was to use the state mechanism as a conduit for the F.B.I.," Kunstler said.

On June 20, the children were released in the temporary custody of Carol's sister. They seem physically O.K. but "shaken," according to the family. Jeremy won't say much about the questioning except that it happened five to ten times, and he cries when asked about his ordeal. Kunstler's associate Ron Kuby is preparing a motion to suppress any statements made by Jeremy under interrogation.

TERRY BISSON AND SALLY O'BRIEN

The children of prisoners in the United States are often treated vindictively. Legal Services for Prisoners with Children frequently encounters cases in which youngsters are placed in foster homes rather than in the custody of relatives, or in which mothers in no other way unfit lose custody of their children altogether. For information, contact Ellen Barry, director, 1663 Mission Street, San Francisco, CA 94103.

Terry Bisson is an editor and writer who is currently in prison for refusing to testify before a Washington grand jury. Sally O'Brien is a freelance writer and an anchor and news reporter at WBAI.

VICTORY IN TEXAS!

Back in September of 1981 *The Nation* ran a story about a no-holds-barred mayoral campaign that pitted the Anglo elite of McAllen, Texas, against a populist coalition of Mexican-American professionals, small-business men and poverty-stricken farmers [see David C. Kibbe and Kenneth Bain, "*Patrón* Politics in McAllen, Texas," September 26, 1981]. The leading figure in the drama, Mayor Othal Brand, didn't like the article and sued for libel in 1982. The American Civil Liberties Union agreed to represent *The Nation* and its writers, and two years after that, James C. Harrington of the American Civil Liberties Foundation of Texas argued in court that the *Nation* article was protected under the First Amendment by virtue of Mayor Brand's status as a public figure. On July 12, Judge Mario E. Ramirez Jr. of the 332nd Judicial District of Texas dismissed the case on our motion for summary judgment.

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BEAT THE DEVIL.

Imperial Addictions

Key West, Florida

The scene on a Key West dock this past Sunday, July 21, was as apt an illustration of the relationship between the developed and underdeveloped world as you could find by merely swiveling your head 180 degrees.

Being unloaded in front of me from a boat to an old flatbed truck were ten silver bars and two paint buckets full of seventeenth-century coins, part of the vast hoard uncovered the day before off the Marquesas, thirty-five miles to the southwest. Glancing a couple hundred yards south from these relicts of Spanish imperial exploitation of the Americas, I could see the construction equipment of the crews that are diligently upgrading the U.S. Navy's wharves and fueling facilities, backup for a North American imperial armada proceeding against Nicaragua.

On a sunny day I would have been able to see Fat Albert too, thus rounding off the thought-provoking vista of colonial relations then and now, but for once Fat Albert, the spy blimp hovering over the Lower Keys, was concealed by clouds, unable to monitor whatever drug commerce was taking place that day in the Florida straits. The same dock that now carried the silver bars also saw the Mariel refugees land in 1980. Thus, what with the Navy ships and the intercepting craft of the U.S. Coast Guard, the Key West scene united three forms of export that trouble the United States—cocaine, refugees and revolution.

Mel Fisher and his team of treasure seekers had been looking for this silver for sixteen years, and the day before, a young diver from Iowa named Greg Wareham finally came upon the mother lode fifty-four feet down. That Saturday was also the opening of the Florida lobster season, and along with several thousand people up and down the Keys, we'd been diving for them off a boat. Catching Florida "bugs" is a bit like interviewing a nervous politician. You see the horny antennae waving cautiously from a dark hole in a coral head. You dive down, and out comes the bug, declining to make any statement on the record and trying to sidle away down the corridor. The next thing is to get your scoop net behind the bug and then waggle a stick in its face, as if it were a microphone. The bug leaps back toward its hole and, if all goes well, straight into your net, where it thrashes about shouting for lawyers. Its only chance is that the Florida Marine Patrol will deem it to be less than legal size, throw it back and fine you $500 in the bargain.

We'd caught seventeen of them by the time, late in the day, we heard much shouting on the radio about "a reef of silver" sixty feet long; later still, a diver described the silver ingots stacked like logs of wood, with our friends the Florida crayfish living comfortably in the crevices and not pleased to be witnessing the largest treasure find in U.S. history.

Silverado

On the dock on Sunday afternoon the ingots looked unimpressive, blackened by silver sulfide, like charred logs, seventy pounds in weight and fifteen inches long, crusted with barnacles from 363 years under the waves after the Nuestra Señora de Atocha went down in a hurricane on September 6, 1622. Each ingot has a number or marking on it, and since the Spanish ran the first modern bureaucratic empire, Fisher's people will be able to check from a copy of the ship's original manifest which mine each ingot came from and whether it was the property of Philip IV or a private asset being sent home by a businessman or priest to Castile. Silver bar number 569, for example, was sent by Capt. Duarte Marquez, based in Cartagena, Nueva Grenada, to his partners in Spain as their slice of the profit on the 1,400 West African slaves sold in Cartagena that year.

Most of the silver on the Atocha came from the great mine at Potosí, 4,000 feet up on the *altiplano* of what was Peru and is now Bolivia. The Spanish boom town there had 160,000 inhabitants, 14 gambling houses, 120 white prostitutes for the carriage trade. At the mine some 13,000 Indians, forced laborers, dragged the ore out of shafts as deep as 2,000 feet. At the bottom of the shafts they gasped in the heat, and on the bleak *altiplano*, clad in rags, they trembled in the cold. As a Spanish official named Luis Capoche remarked at the time, "The only relief they have from their labors is to be told that they are dogs, beaten on the pretext of having brought up too little metal, taken too long, or that what they have brought up is earth or that they had stolen some metal." Most of the Indians died fairly rapidly of silicosis. After 1585, when an Englishman invented the amalgamating process of refining silver, they died of mercury poisoning too, adding their corpses to the body count: 150 years after the arrival of Columbus in 1492, the number of Indians in the Americas had dropped from about 70 million to 12 million.

Pretty Poison

By the time the Atocha set sail from Havana in 1622 the Spanish Empire was in serious decline, freighted with debt, its economy rotted by this same silver from Potosí and the mines near Mexico City, just as oil has distorted and rotted the economies of nations like Mexico today. Spanish economists of the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries groaned piteously as they accurately predicted that these constant boosts in the money supply from New Grenada and New Spain would unleash a savage price explosion and concomitant inflation. The economy tilted from manufacture to service. The lower classes staggered under an increasing tax burden, and the upper classes frisked in conspicuous consumption as Spain became an entrepôt between the New World and the manufacturing nations to the north. "Spain," one economist lamented, "is the foreigners' Indies; they treat us like Indians." The international bankers of the time, underwriting the imperial deficit, paced the docks of Cádiz, with first lien on whatever treasure survived the winds, the waves and the pirates.

The Atocha loaded up first in Porto Bello, on the northern side of the Panamanian isthmus. The manifest lists among other things thousands of coins from the sale of

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ALEXANDER COCKBURN

papal indulgences and fines levied by local courts, along with 21,323 pieces of eight as part of the royal settlement to the heirs of Christopher Columbus. From Porto Bello the ship headed to Cartagena to take on gold mined by the African slaves. When it left Havana, on September 4, it carried 1,032 silver ingots, 255,000 silver coins and 161 pieces of gold (excluding personal contraband), all worth about a million pesos, along with 235 people, many of them grandees, six of them "persons of no consequence," that is,

But the fleet left too late, for September is the middle of hurricane season in these waters. The winds picked up and the Atocha went down two days later, and there were only five survivors: a seaman, two apprentices, two persons of no consequence and no grandees at all. The King, the heirs of Columbus, the international bankers and the partners of Duarte Marquez paced the dock of Cádiz in vain.

Death and Taxes

Now the treasure extracted with such misery in Potosí will continue its vigorous twentieth-century career as an outcrop of the U.S. tax system. The indefatigable Fisher, who successfully fought off the claims of the Federal government and the State of Florida on the booty, amassed about 700 investors in the treasure hunt, both large and small, who, over the years, have sent in their dollars and taken their write-offs. As the silver comes up, a great tax shelter starts to go down. Although the market value of the metal in each silver ingot is about $7,000, the historical value of the bar can be much more; still, the value of the hoard is not necessarily anywhere near the $3 billion to $4 billion at first touted by the irrepressible Fisher. An investor can donate his ingot to a museum and take whatever write-off an appraising committee persuades the I.R.S. to stand for. The royal tax men of Philip IV who took the King's 20 percent cut in Potosí yield to the artistry of the U.S. Federal tax code and those who know how to use it.

Coke Is It

The flatbed truck trundled the bars and coins off to their new life in another late imperial economy. I looked south toward the Navy base, where a paradigm of the U.S. national security obsession is conveniently on display. Beyond the men and machinery industriously strengthening the wharf for ships headed for Central America looms the remains of Fort Zachary Taylor. It was part of a string of forts planned down the East Coast shortly after the War of 1812. Engineers and building crews toiled for more than fifty years to bring it to completion, and in the hour of its glory, it loomed over Key West, with tremendous cannon pointed in the general direction of Cuba. But what with time overruns, the fort was by then obsolete, and U.S. Army sappers demolished a large part of it at the outbreak of the Spanish-American War. It has just been opened as a state park, representing the most southerly military boondoggle in the continental United States. I was able to tell a recent group of visitors there that they should thank me for the amenity, since my ancestor Adm. Sir George Cockburn was one of the leaders of the British in 1812 and thus it was the Cockburn Threat that prompted the construction of the fort. By way of response, Cullen Chambers, the park ranger there, has proposed that I be ritually tarred and feathered each July 4 as entertainment for the locals.

Above Fort Taylor swoop U.S. Navy jets from the airfield at Boca Chica, a few miles up the road. There is so much hardware flying above southern Florida that plummeting chunks of propellers, engines and assorted military garbage are a recognized hazard for the terrestrials. Nearer at hand, the eye travels past an old white building—a southern White House, in fact, in which Harry Truman lingered and to which John Kennedy repaired at the time of the Bay of Pigs invasion—out to sea, where officials of the Customs Service and the Coast Guard labor mightily to prevent the landing of a commodity much more valuable than the Spanish silver: cocaine.

The Spanish spent much time and effort trying to make sure that their silver got safely in past the pirates and the reefs, whereas U.S. officials struggle to keep the cocaine out. This must be the first time a state has passed up so rich an excise opportunity. The Spanish crown got its tax of a *quinto*, or fifth, of all bullion minted. The U.S. Treasury gets nothing from the cocaine trade, though the employment of all those agents is a jobs program of sorts. As far as the countries servicing the addicted metropolitan centers are concerned, cocaine is surely a better bargain than silver. Silver, in the lust to find it and the rush to extract it, contributed considerably to the deaths of more than 50 million Indians. In the case of cocaine, the relations of production and distribution are a considerable improvement, though not anything we would want to see in actually-existing or utopian socialism.

Back in the metropole, silver didn't do Spain much good in the end, as it addicted and stupefied the economy. With cocaine, it's a mixed story. On the one hand, as Jesse Jackson constantly points out, its effect on ghettos has been bad—like many other forms of commodity circulation under capitalism. On the other hand, the cocaine trade has picked up the slack from trickle-down social spending in the 1960s, the free market's answer to straightforward government handouts. Nothing's perfect. It would probably be better to hook slot machines in every community into a computer bank of the leading economic indicators and adjust the payouts according to the needs of Keynesian stimulus or contraction. The "dignity of labor" crowd wouldn't like it, but it would be a pretty democratic way of coping with the demand side of the economy.

In the interim, the cocaine and marijuana trade has played a valiant countercyclical role in the Reagan years, as anyone making a study of the retail economy of small American towns will speedily discover. Of course, it would be rational for the Feds to legalize cocaine and take its *quinto*, but that would mean dealing with the supplying countries in a rational and constructive way, which, as the vista in Key West makes clear, is not a likely proposition.

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MINORITY REPORT.

CHRISTOPHER HITCHENS

Terrorism threatens to emerge as one of the great junk subjects of our era. It has already generated numerous junk seminars, endless junk TV shows, about half a dozen junk tanks and countless junk speeches and junk books. Plus which, it has evolved a whole breed of cretinous monomaniacs—junk experts—who fill the screens and the Op-Ed pages with their junk lucubrations. Herewith, then, my two cents' worth of junk reflections.

"Terrorism" was a buzzword of the Reaganites from the start. I remember attending a debate in 1981 at New York University, in which the reactionary side was taken by a man named Constantine Menges. The fact that Menges now directs terrorist operations against Nicaragua from the safety of the National Security Council is both here and there. On this occasion, having blathered for hours about terror and terrorists, he was asked by Alexander Cockburn to give a definition of "terrorism." Looking madly about, he dodged this perfectly simple and obvious question. Pressed, he thought for a bit and defined terrorism as "the use of violence for political ends."

The fatuity of this encapsulation, which would include everybody except absolute pacifists within its terms, is at least a faint improvement on the definition advanced by Menges's new employers. They define terrorism as "the use by some people of violence for some political ends." This merely adds hypocrisy to tautology. And the hypocrisy and tautology are so evident that many people have sickened of the whole debate. It is common on the left to hear the question dismissed as yet another junk ideological construct.

This would be a pity if it were to become general. Just because the Reaganites have appropriated the word, we must not conclude that there is nothing more to it than another example of imperial double standards. The original thinkers and founders of the socialist movement spent a great deal of time thinking about terrorism and criticizing it. There is much to be learned from those debates.

One can define a terrorist as someone who possesses the following qualities. His chief targets must be civilians and noncombatants (not always the same thing), and there must be a political reason why they are his prey. His cause must be a hopeless one. He must be without a realizable manifesto, program or objective. In other words, violence must be his end as well as his means.

Does anybody fit this bizarre profile? Yes, just as many who are supposed to fit it do not. All states and all armies employ terror, but they do not, except in rare cases, depend solely on its use. Many nationalist movements, such as the Irgun, the I.R.A., the P.L.O. and others have also employed violence against noncombatants in the course of operations, but cannot be reduced to the definition of "terrorist" *tout court*. The obvious objection to such a reductionist definition is that it would have to include the wartime Maquis and many other movements that have dirtied their hands with cruel and indiscriminate tactics.

Take, on the other hand, the South Moluccan gunmen in the Netherlands several years ago. Their tactic was to seize Dutch civilians—in one case a whole trainload of them—and hold them hostage, demanding the government of Indonesia grant independence to the South Moluccan archipelago. The government of Indonesia would under no circumstances relinquish said archipelago, and the one government in the world that would have the least chance of persuading it to do so would be the former colonial Dutch. It would be possible to describe the acts of the gunmen as terrorist—the use of random, hopeless violence against the innocent. Living in Holland, these people did not even have the excuse (which, say, Palestinians or Namibians do) that they had been forcibly denied other means of redress.

Following this logic, one can define the Red Brigades in Italy, the Baader-Meinhof group in Germany and the Japanese Red Army as terrorist. The declared intention of these groups was to provoke the state into taking fascist measures, the better to bring about the revolution. Interestingly, all three were made up of young people whose parents had lived under or been complicit with Axis regimes. And there was an echo of Third Period Stalinism in their politics too—the Stalinists in Germany and elsewhere who had said, in the greatest political betrayal of this century, "After Hitler, us." The frank denial of democratic values allows one to say that those involved had a terrorist mentality. Their links with organized crime and with former fascists only amplify the point. And their slogans—"*Tanto pio, tanto meglia*" ("The worse, the better")—are only variations of the old and discredited *politique du pire*.

It was against this kind of thinking and this method that the early Marxists wrote their sternest polemics. The Narodniks, the anarchists of "propaganda by deed" and the practitioners of assassination and provocation were condemned, not so much morally (no state or party has the moral right to condemn the use of violence) as because they engendered secrecy, conspiracy, sadism and despair. They also invited, as they often meant to, appalling state reprisals on open, democratic associations of working people. Many brave men and women—former Tupamaros in Uruguay, for example—now realize that their attempt to show the fascist character of the state brought down larger forces than themselves.

Some years ago, Claude Chabrol made a film about a terrorist group in Paris that doesn't want anything, can't get anything and never demands anything. It is slaughtered by the state, which is never as reluctant as liberals suppose to resort to indiscriminate terror on its own account. The film's title, *Nada* ("Nothing"), intentionally recalled the older and better name for terrorism, which is nihilism. The nihilist cannot be placated or satisfied. Like the Party of God, he wants nothing less than the impossible or the unthinkable. This is what distinguishes him from the revolutionary. And this is what he has in common with the rulers of our world, who subject us to lectures about the need to oppose terrorism while they prepare, daily and hourly, for the annihilation of us all. Those who contemplate the thermonuclear extinction of the species "for political ends" have nothing to learn from the nihilist tradition.

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CALVIN TRILLIN

I figured the big question about our twentieth wedding anniversary might be whether the local newspaper would send a reporter out to interview us, the way reporters always used to interview those old codgers who managed to hit 100. ("Mr. Scroggins offers no formula for longevity, although he acknowledged that he has polished off a quart of Jim Beam whiskey every day of his adult life.") I figured that might be the big question even though the local newspaper is *The Village Voice*. Or maybe I figured that might be the big question *because* the local newspaper is *The Village Voice*. In Greenwich Village, after all, we are known rather widely for being married. We enjoy a mild collateral renown for having children. Several years ago, in fact, I expressed concern that we might be put on the Gray Line tour of Greenwich Village as a nuclear family.

It occurred to me that all this might be vaguely embarrassing; in recent years it has become common to hear people all over the country speak of long-term marriage in a tone of voice that assumes it to be inextricably intertwined with the music of Lawrence Welk. In the presence of someone who has been married a long time to the same person, a lot of people seem to feel the way they might feel in the presence of a Methodist clergyman or an I.R.S. examiner. When I asked a friend of mine recently how his twenty-fifth college reunion had gone—he had attended with the very same attractive and pleasant woman he married shortly after graduation—he said, "Well, after the first day, I decided to start introducing Marge as my second wife, and that seemed to make everyone a lot more comfortable."

This awkwardness in the presence of marriage has, of course, been particularly in the Village, a neighborhood so hip that it is no longer unusual to see people wearing their entire supply of earrings on one ear. ("'I don't hold with jewelry or none of them geegaws,' Mr. Scroggins said, 'although over the long haul I've found that a single gold stud in one ear can set off a spring ensemble to good advantage.'") In the Village, a lot of people don't get married, and a lot of those who do seem to get unmarried pretty much on the way back from the ceremony. In other words, the institution has been leaking from both ends. When our older daughter was in first grade at P.S. 3, one of the romantically named grade schools in the Village, I happened to be among the parents escorting the class on a lizard-buying expedition to a local purveyor called Exotic Aquatics; as we crossed Seventh Avenue, the little boy I had by the hand looked up at me and said, "Are you divorced yet?" When I said that I wasn't, he didn't make fun of me or anything like that—they teach tolerance at P.S. 3, along with a smattering of spelling—but I could sense his discomfort in having to cross a major artery in the company of someone who was a little bit behind.

Reaching a twentieth anniversary might just intensify such discomfort among our neighbors. I could imagine what would be said if that little boy's parents happened to meet by chance now and our names came up. (As I envision the sort of lives they lead, she has just quit living with her psychotherapist in New Jersey to join a radical feminist woodcutting collective; her former husband is in the process of breaking up with a waitress who has decided that what she really wants to do is direct.) "Oh, them!" the woodcutter would say. "Why, they've been married for *decades*!" The more I considered it, the more I thought that if a reporter in our neighborhood came out to interview people on the twentieth anniversary of their marriage, the questions might be less like the ones he'd ask a citizen who had reached the age of 100 than the ones he'd ask someone who has chosen to construct a replica of the 1939 World's Fair out of multicolored toothpicks in his recreation room. ("Tell me, Mr. McVeeter, is this some sort of nutso fixation, or what?")

Then I happened to run into the old college classmate I call Martin G. Cashflow. In both investments and social trends, Cashflow prides himself on just having got out of what other people are about to get into and just having got in on the ground floor of what other people haven't yet heard about. After Cashflow had filled me in on his recent activities—he had just got out of whelk-farming tax shelters and into chewing of hallucinogenic kudzu—he asked what I'd been up to.

"Twentieth anniversary," I mumbled.

"Terrific!" Cashflow said. He looked at me as if I had just revealed that I was in on the ground floor of a hot electronics issue. At least, I think that's the way he looked at me; I really don't have much experience at being looked at as if I had just revealed that I was in on the ground floor of a hot electronics issue.

Cashflow told me that among people in their 20s marriage has come back into fashion. As he explained the way things have been going, marriage is part of a sort of fifties revival package that's back in vogue, along with neckties and naked ambition. "Best thing you ever did," Cashflow said. "They're all doing it now, but look at the equity you've got built up."

I shrugged modestly. You don't brag about that sort of thing. Then I went home and told my wife that we were in fashion.

"Not while you're wearing that jacket we're not," she said.

I told her about the fifties package that people in their 20s were bringing back into vogue. She said that if the alternative was to be identified with those little strivers, she would prefer to be thought of as inextricably intertwined with the music of Lawrence Welk.

I could see her point, but I still looked forward to an interview with the local paper. I would be modest, almost to a fault. I would not mention Jim Beam whiskey. The reporter would try to be objective, but he wouldn't be able to hide his admiration for my equity.

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ARTICLES.

REFORM FOR THE RICH

Reagan's Tax Package Unwrapped

BERNARD D. NOSSITER

President Reagan's Tax Proposals for Fairness, Growth and Simplicity are a radical assault on the progressive income tax, a knee in the groin for workers and a windfall for those whose income derives from speculation in stocks and bonds. It is eminently fair to the very rich, provides genuine relief for the very poor and is so complex that the Commissioner of Internal Revenue has said he will need more help to administer it.

"Our tax system has come to be un-American," Reagan declared, but for all its flaws, the system is in the American grain. Its fourteen brackets reflect an elemental notion of justice: the higher a person's income, the more he or she should pay, relatively and absolutely, to support the expenses of government. The first income tax, established by Woodrow Wilson in 1913, embodied the principle. Those with incomes between $4,000 and $20,000 paid 1 percent; those between $20,000 and $50,000 paid 2 percent; and so on up to 6 percent on incomes of more than $500,000.

Reagan's plan, in his own words, is "a giant step toward an ideal system," presumably a single rate for all. He compresses the fourteen brackets into three, lopping off three at the bottom and bringing down the top rate, for incomes over $70,000, from 50 percent to 35 percent—a generous slice of 30 percent. A single rate, however, is regressive: like a sales tax, it imposes the same percentage burden on rich and poor. With only three years left in office, Reagan is not likely to be around long enough to see his ideal system realized, but a successor Bush regime could carry on the crusade.

Tax reformers less cynical than Reagan make fairness their primary objective. Those with the same income should pay the same tax regardless of how they earned their money. The Reagan proposal does not do this. Citizens who draw paychecks would pay more, proportionately, than those whose income derives from oil and gas wells, real estate shelters and capital gains.

The President's most generous gift to his well-heeled supporters is the privileged taxation of capital gains, the income from the sale of assets like shares of stock. Half of this income would go untaxed, meaning those in the top bracket would give up only 17.5 percent of their gain. This is a pleasant bonus, better than the current capital-gains rate of 20 percent. It would provide an added incentive for T. Boone Pickens and other raiders who make their money by frightening corporate executives with the loss of their perquisites. Pickens now keeps $40 million of the $50 million that raided executives pay him to go away. Under Reagan's system, he would keep $41.25 million. To be sure, he would have to hold his shares six months. More modest shareholders who sell old Exxon paper or old I.B.M. paper would benefit similarly, if on a smaller scale. These schemes, of course, would be open to any worker who had the cash.

The President is two-faced about oil. He plans to strip the industry of its egregious depletion allowance but preserve its far more valuable benefits from intangible drilling costs. Those are the expenses of readying a site for drilling, everything except the cost of the drill itself. In normal business practice, this equipment would be written off over the ten or more years of its useful life; the oil industry, however, can write them off in one year, as if they were ordinary business expenses for postage stamps, files or salaries. The Treasury Department estimates this device will save the industry more than $8 billion a year in taxes.

At the other end of the scale, the Administration boasts that it will take 2.5 million families near the poverty line off the tax rolls. Although the government has played fast and loose with many figures, there is reason to believe that the Reagan measure would come close to bringing the impoverished back to where they were in 1978, before higher Social Security taxes and inflation swelled their tax burden. The President, however, has chosen a Reaganite way to lower taxes for the poor. He raises by a little the bottom income slice that is exempt from taxes and almost doubles the deduction all taxpayers can take for dependents. Thus, the corporate executive who makes $300,000 a year and has a wife and two children could lop off from his taxable income the same $8,000 as the single mother in Harlem who has a low-paying job and three children. Reagan also increases an earned-income credit for the working poor. Still, even according to Reagan, barely one family in four earning less than $10,000 would receive a tax cut; one in twenty-five would suffer an increase. On the other hand, nearly three in four earning $200,000 or more would enjoy lower taxes.

In contrast with his treatment of these two special classes—the very rich and the very poor—Reagan has devised some ingenious torments for salaried workers. Now unemployment pay and compensation for those injured on the job are largely tax free (jobless benefits over $18,000 are taxed). Such payments are clearly income, but society says that because jobless or disabled workers endure unusual stress and pain, they should not pay. They may be struggling to meet mortgages or finance costly medical care.

According to Reagan's philosophy, however, benefit payments are disincentives, encouraging people not to work. Under his plan, those benefits would be taxed like any other income—except the income Pickens or the Rockefellers make. As a miner with black lung disease coughs for the last time, Reagan would leave him one consoling thought: his funeral benefits would not be taxed.

For businesses, expenses incurred to produce income are

Bernard D. Nossiter is a veteran journalist who is completing a study of North-South economic conflict.

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deductible. Reagan proposes to curtail similar privileges for workers, creating a new category of disprivileged income. Union dues, work clothes, the cost of schooling to upgrade a skill, would be deductible only after the first 1 percent of a worker's income is subtracted. Thus, a worker earning $35,000 could not deduct the first $350 of these expenses.

Health benefits provided by an employer to workers are also not taxed now. But Reagan regards them as income in kind. His scheme taxes the first $300 of any family's benefits, the first $120 of a single worker's. He sweeps impartially into his net the medical insurance provided to the $200,000-a-year lawyer and the $15,000-a-year garment worker.

Taxes, the President says, should "reflect and support our deeper values and highest aspirations." One of his, quite evidently, is to take women out of the job market and put them back in the home, rearing children, cooking, attending the church of their choice. To that end, he would do two things: restore the marriage penalty and reduce tax savings for less-well-off employed mothers who pay someone to tend their children. The marriage penalty is an anomaly of graduated rates. The combined income of a husband and wife puts them in a higher bracket than if they were living in sin, filing separate returns. To overcome this disadvantage, current law allows the couple to deduct up to $3,000. Reagan would like to abolish that.

He has run into formidable trouble, however. Bob Packwood, Republican chair of the Senate Finance Committee, has raised some objections. The Treasury Department did not realize (or did not want to know) that the loss of this deduction would turn tax cuts into tax increases for many median-income earners in Oregon, New York and other states with high budgets. The department's statisticians had carefully drawn up analyses of the median-income family in all fifty states, showing that everyone would pay lower taxes under the Reagan plan. Unfortunately, those calculations were based on families with one income earner. Since a majority of husbands and wives in this bracket work, the analyses were useless.

Much of the media debate has dealt with Reagan's proposal to end deductions for state and local taxes. The purpose of that provision, aside from raising cash to pay for other giveaways, is to force states to slash their budgets for schools, welfare, public housing and other things Reagan doesn't like. There is something to Reagan's argument that the current provision compels low-taxed Oklahomans to subsidize indirectly high-taxed New Yorkers—just as New Yorkers subsidize Oklahoma's oil wells. If Federal grants replaced the revenues the states would lose after they cut their taxes, and if a tax reform bill was passed that would close all escape hatches for the rich and their corporations, removing the provision could be justified. Since neither seems likely, it is not.

To make his worker "reforms" palatable, Reagan's scheme reduces taxes modestly for many people. Its three brackets trim rates for all income classes; the increased personal exemptions and the expanded slice free of all taxes finish the job. Taken together, these measures outweigh the lost deductions at least for some. But how much each income group gains is unclear. In a striking departure from past practice, the Treasury Department offered only percentage estimates, which are misleading, rather than the absolute dollar amounts. Thanks to the admirable Center on Budget and Policy Priorities, a foundation-supported research group in Washington, some independent calculations are available: those with incomes under $10,000 will get an average cut of $104; between $20,000 and $30,000, $149; between $30,000 and $50,000, $211; over $200,000, $9,254. Therefore, the Reagan plan is worth at least forty times as much to rich people as it is to people in the middle.

For business, the proposal closes some of the more blatant loopholes but leaves enough of them open to require taxpayers to list their "preference" income, or money derived from loopholes. Most intriguing and most arcane is the treatment of depreciation. Every prudent firm must put aside funds to replace worn-out or obsolete machines, plants and buildings. This is a reasonable deductible

DRAWINGS BY SEYMOUR CHWAST

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business expense. From a common sense and an economist's point of view, a firm should be allowed to deduct during a tool's useful life a sum equal to the cost of replacing it.

But Reagan has gone this one better. His 1981 measure gave firms fast write-offs, enabling them to deduct far more than replacement costs and at a pace much quicker than that of useful life. That has helped Lockheed, General Electric, other arms merchants and large corporations earn billions in profits and still escape all taxes. The new proposal retains fast write-offs but at a somewhat slower rate. That is no small boon. The proposal would save corporations at least $176 billion over the next five years compared to write-offs at an economic rate tied to the useful life of a tool or plant.

Corporate bliss is not unalloyed, though. Reagan would wipe out the investment credit, a splendid subsidy which allows firms to subtract from putative tax bills up to 10 percent of the cost of any machine. That makes up a big part of the tax-free privileges of many giants. But what the President takes away, he quickly restores, at least for his corporate friends: their notional tax rate would drop from 46 percent to 33 percent.

The perpetuation of fast write-offs, like the windfall for capital gains, is defended as a stimulant to economic growth, marshaling capital and spurring investment to lead the economy onward and upward. No doubt, tax privileges will produce some marginal investment that would not otherwise be made. But in the end, individuals and corporations invest in anticipation of future demand. Growth is better obtained by insuring a rising level of demand and marshaling tax, spending and monetary policies to employ idle resources. At full employment, the pressure of demand will call forth investment. Tax gimmicks are an inferior method for achieving the desired goal.

Reagan, of course, rejects this argument. In the short run, he seeks to cut the taxes paid by his friends and the corporations they control. In the long run, he seeks to rewrite history, converting the traditional progressive income tax into a blunt, regressive instrument that strikes hardest at those who work for his friends. □

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SPEAKING OUT AGAINST WAR

The 'Moment Before'

ELINOR LANGER

Although you might not know it from the newspapers, one of the most strenuously lobbied issues being debated in Portland, Oregon, this summer is whether to declare the city a nuclear-free zone, an issue that has pitted an array of clergy, peace groups and citizens at large against the business community, with the new Mayor, J.E. (Bud) Clark, and the City Council dangling uneasily in between. Two things distinguish the measure under consideration in Portland from those declaring nuclear-free zones elsewhere: its binding nature and its applicability. Although nationally nearly one hundred localities have been declared nuclear-free zones, in places where there is involvement in the nuclear weapons industry the declarations have been nonbinding, and in places where they are binding, there is no nuclear weapons industry.

Portland, in a sense, is in between. Only two local companies are known to be involved in nuclear weapons production: OECO, which manufactures missile guidance systems, and Precision Castparts, which produces titanium castings for cruise missiles. Of the two, OECO is moving to an adjacent town, Milwaukee, next year and Precision Castparts' nuclear weapons work is done at another plant, so its officials can say that no nuclear weapons' parts are being produced in Portland now. Together with the fact that the weapons' parts represent only a small fraction of the company's business in both cases, this situation has led to considerable difference of opinion about the extent to which the measure is or is not symbolic, but it has not reduced the intensity of the central debate.

So far the battle lines have been drawn thus: The public favors a ban on the ground that any statement, any action, by any public body is better than nothing for registering desperation about nuclear war. Business opposes one on the ground that where regulation begins, you never know where it will end and any regulation—even debate about possible regulation—makes difficult, if not impossible, the never-ending task of attracting business and jobs. Needless to say, though everyone says it, no-one-is-in-favor-of-nuclear-war. The arguments over the possible resolution hinge on the jurisdiction of the City Council and the constitutionality of a ban (which the City Attorney's office has said can be "reasonably" defended) on the one hand, and its effectiveness as a political strategy and its effect on the reputation of Portland on the other.

Elinor Langer's Josephine Herbst: The Story She Could Never Tell *will be published in paperback in August by Warner Books.*

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It is the last point that particularly troubles the members of the City Council, for it involves their own reputations as well. While being against business is not a popular position at the moment, neither, in the idiosyncratic politics of the city, is being unprincipled, and whether banning nuclear weapons production would be seen as irresponsible or pure, no one is completely sure. Until now, the response to the dilemma has been to stall. Contrary to usual practice, an ordinance has yet to be introduced—introduction implies sponsorship, which implies a commitment, which no Council member has yet been willing to make—and behind the scenes attention has been focused on finding a formula that could unite the opposing forces. The Mayor has promised to bring forth such a formula for a binding vote, but as of this writing a date for the vote has not been set.

What follows is Nation *editorial board member Elinor Langer's testimony on the issue to the Portland City Council.*

Last fall I sat at home by myself and watched the initial hearings on television and was very much affected by what I saw. I particularly remember the high-school girl, dressed in black, with a punk hairdo, who said, "We're not bad kids; we're just freaked out," and I thought to myself, there really *is* a correspondence between how these kids look and how they feel, and I was reminded of a joke current in the early years of the Nazi era: Hitler goes to a barber and complains, "Look at my hair, how flat it is. What can I do to make it stick up a little?" "Stick your head out the window and look at what is going on in Germany," the barber replies, "and your hair will stand on end for the rest of your life." As it does with other animals, this stuck-out hair should tell us that something frightful is going on.

One of my interests as a writer and reader is the literature of what might be called the moment before. You probably know the genre—*The Last Days of Pompeii* and *The Guns of August* are related to it—portraits of societies about to vanish forever. A recent example is the Israeli novelist Aharon Appelfeld's *Badenheim 1939*, in which, as the publisher so well puts it, "the characters on stage are so deeply held by their defensive daily trivia that they manage to misconstrue every signal of their fate," and in which the central subject is the struggle between the characters and their own self-deceptions. Let me read you a paragraph from another such novel, *Prater Violet*, by Christopher Isherwood, published in 1945 but set in 1939:

> Like all my friends, I said I believed a European war was coming soon. I believed it as one believes that one will die, and yet I didn't believe. For the coming war was as unreal to me as death itself. It was unreal because I couldn't imagine anything beyond it; I refused to imagine anything; just as a spectator refuses to imagine what is behind the scenery in a theater. The outbreak of war, like the moment of death, crossed my perspective of the future like a wall; it marked the instant total end of my imagined world. I thought about this wall from time to time, with acute depression and a flutter of fear at the solar plexus. Then, again, I forgot or ignored it. Also, just as when one thinks of one's own death, I secretly whispered to myself, "Who knows? Maybe we shall get around it somehow. Maybe it will never happen."

I believe that the moment we are living in is such a moment—that we are all going around whispering to ourselves, "Who knows? Maybe it will never happen," while knowing that it will—and that it is exactly this state of illusion which makes it so difficult to take the simple steps that would acknowledge, and by acknowledging possibly lead to alleviating, our lot. I believe that the inability of the City Council so far to confront the issue by bringing forward a simple and sensible ordinance declaring Portland a nuclear-free zone is an instance of the common illusion. I do not mean to suggest that others, myself included, are exempt. As someone whose work involves the habit of introspection, I can report that between my longstanding "right opinions" on the subject of nuclear war and my appearance here today—my first such public appearance—my mind presented me with many arguments against testifying, including (a) my preoccupation with other matters; (b) my lack of exper-

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tise; (c) the largely symbolic nature of the issue, at least in relation to national defense if not in relation to the city; and (d) the futility of action. I hope I may be forgiven a writer's presumption if I say that I wonder whether the reasoning of members of the City Council, which has led to the absence of an actual ordinance today, is not much the same: namely, there are other issues before us; it is not really our jurisdiction; it is too limited in its national impact to take any risks for locally; and, ultimately, we are lost anyway.

The problem with this reasoning is, of course, its circularity. If we act, we may die; but if we don't act, we will surely die—a death that, as Jonathan Schell has so articulately argued, is not mere individual death but extinction. The difference between this "moment before" and all others is that this time there will be no posterity to cluck over our illusions. It will all be gone.

The tyranny of nuclear weapons is a new form of tyranny. We are hostage to it when social services are cut so that defense can expand. We are hostage to it again when the justification for government policy in Central America is that it will prevent a later confrontation with the Soviet Union that would lead to nuclear war. We are hostage to it because it threatens our ultimate freedom: the freedom to be. It *is* our place to act, it is all of our places to act, because there is no force other than public opinion that is capable of bringing about change. The Federal government not only cannot lead, it can barely follow. It is too vast. It is too internally divided. And as the recent MX votes show, it brokers too many issues simultaneously to be effective on any one. Every instance of progress in arms control that has been made since 1945 has been made in response to just such public pressure as declaring Portland a nuclear-free zone would represent. We must act on the local level because that is where the hope of the American republic always has been and always will be. The early colonists did not have to quarter soldiers in their houses—remember the Bill of Rights?—and we do not have to quarter nuclear weapons, or the parts for nuclear weapons, in our cities.

It is very difficult to feel passionate about something and powerless at the same time. To act we must overcome our deepest pessimism about the outcome. But there is no alternative. Otherwise, not only this government but every other government, and not only this form of enterprise but every other form of enterprise, and everything else, will surely perish from the earth. □

FOOTNOTE ON AN HISTORIC CASE: IN RE ALGER HISS

William A. Reuben, in his 1983 booklet, identifies 114 factual errors in the Federal District Court of New York's 1982 decision upholding Hiss's conviction for perjury in 1950. That flawed decision, upheld by the U.S. Supreme Court in 1983, stands as the last legal word on one of the most celebrated cases in modern history. 1 copy $5, 10 copies $40, 50 copies $150, 100 copies $250. Make checks payable to The Nation Institute and send to "Hiss," The Nation Institute, 72 Fifth Avenue, New York, NY 10011.

SUING THE VICTIMS

Voting Rights Activists Acquitted

ALLEN TULLOS

On July 5, a Federal jury in Selma, Alabama, acquitted Albert Turner, Spencer Hogue Jr. and Evelyn Turner, the voting rights activists known as the Marion Three. The Justice Department had charged them with conspiracy, altering absentee ballots, voting more than once and committing mail fraud.

During the extensive investigation that preceded the trial, white county and state officials, U.S. attorneys and agents of the Federal Bureau of Investigation targeted black civil rights leaders, violated the secrecy of black voters' ballots, spied on a grass-roots voting organization, intimidated grand jury witnesses and ignored evidence of election wrongdoing by the defendants' political opponents. Several months and several hundred thousand dollars later, Federal prosecutors came up with fourteen absentee ballots that the Turners and Hogue allegedly had conspired to cast and mail illegally in Perry County during last September's Alabama Democratic primary elections. "This is the first time the Federal government has used its own laws against those involved in voting rights," observed defense attorney Howard Moore.

Underlying this case and similar investigations in neighboring counties is the emergence of black political power in counties that until recently were dominated by some of the Deep South's strongest white elites. Over the past twenty years, blacks in ten western Alabama counties of the Black Belt—an antebellum plantation region named for its once rich soil—have organized to challenge entrenched white rule. "The local white powers and the Feds have said that the black voters in the Black Belt have gotten too politically strong," said Sumter County Board of Education chair Wendell Paris. "That's what this is about." Albert Turner added, "Powerful white politicians in Alabama, in the South and in Washington are worried and have reason to be worried about the unanimity of black voters."

In moving against Albert Turner, the government targeted one of the South's toughest and most savvy grass-roots political leaders. From 1965 until 1972, Turner directed the Alabama activities of the Southern Christian Leader-

Allen Tullos is editor of Southern Changes, *the bimonthly journal of the Southern Regional Council.*

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ship Conference. He was a chief lieutenant and confidant of Martin Luther King Jr. In 1962, Turner, his wife Evelyn, and Spencer Hogue founded the Perry County Civic League (P.C.C.L.). It helped local blacks fight for the integration of public facilities and institutions; assisted poor, elderly and disabled black citizens in making applications for Federal financial aid; and organized tutoring programs.

Using the wedge provided by the Voting Rights Act of 1965, the organization chipped away at white rule in a county where today 60 percent of the population is black. The Turners initiated the lawsuits that first brought Federal registrars into Perry County. P.C.C.L. supporters brought voters to the polls, accompanied them past uniformed and armed white lawmen and, when asked, accompanied them into the voting booth. The P.C.C.L. was instrumental in instructing those who couldn't get to the polls about the use of the absentee ballot. Large numbers of disabled and elderly blacks vote absentee, as do the many black workers whose jobs involve long hours outside their home counties. As in surrounding counties where similar efforts were made, black registration in Perry County grew steadily, increasing from twelve voters in 1965 to more than 5,000 today. Before 1965, there were virtually no registered black voters in the western Alabama Black Belt; 1982 figures show about 70,000 blacks and 63,000 whites. The 138 black elected officials in the ten counties account for nearly half the state's total.

Albert Turner contends that the man with the most to gain from intimidating black voters in Alabama is Republican U.S. Senator Jeremiah Denton. The far-right Denton, who voted against extending the Voting Rights Act and whose re-election next year is by no means assured (hence his vulnerability to organized black opposition), called Turner's charge a "nefarious lie." Yet during his first term, Denton has intervened several times with Justice officials over voting rights matters in Alabama.

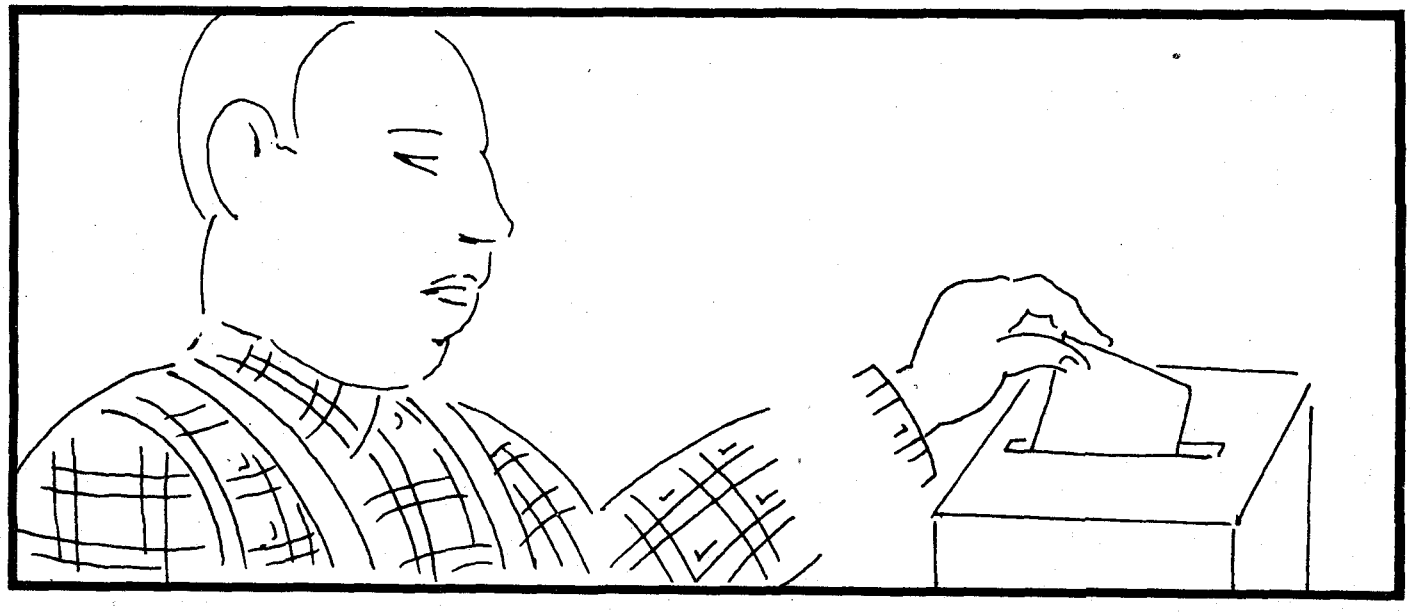
The case of the Marion Three began with white local and state officials reaching out to allies in the Reagan Administration. In Perry County the locally powerful white Circuit Clerk, Mary Aubmertin, and State District Attorney Roy Johnson appealed to Assistant Attorney General William Bradford Reynolds. In a letter to Reynolds, Johnson claimed that absentee voting abuse and intimidation at the polls in the county were "becoming explosive." Reynolds suggested that Johnson take his information to the F.B.I. or to the U.S. Attorney for Alabama's Southern District.

Last year the Justice Department and U.S. Attorney Jeff Sessions of Mobile, who owes his office to Senator Denton, signed on with Aubmertin and Johnson in an investigation of the Perry County Civic League. Conveniently, this effort coincided with the 1984 national elections and with a change in Justice Department policies on alleged voter fraud.

That summer department officials—including Reynolds and Stephen Trott, who is the Deputy Attorney General—decided that Federal agents would henceforth investigate "political participants" who "seek out the elderly, socially disadvantaged, or the illiterate, for the purpose of subjugating their electoral will" or under whose "watchful eye" a voter happened to "mark his or her ballot." The Justice Department applied this policy to black civil rights organizations and activists in several counties in the South where blacks are in the majority and absentee voting is critical to electoral success.

Meanwhile, Johnson's investigation of the P.C.C.L. continued. Local law enforcement officials monitored meetings with listening devices and conducted surveillance of voting assistance activities leading up to the September 4 Democratic primary. With the consent of Alabama Circuit Court Judge Anne McKelvey, U.S. Attorney Sessions and Justice Department officials in Washington—but without the knowledge or consent of the Perry County voters—Aubmertin numbered absentee ballots and envelopes so investigators could identify the names of voters with the candidates they chose.

After the primary, F.B.I. agents visited elderly black citizens, confronted them with ballots they thought had been cast in secret and asked questions about ballot tampering. In the weeks before the November elections, scores of the county's black absentee voters were interrogated at



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home. Then F.B.I. agents, Alabama State Troopers, police officers from the town of Marion and a local game warden loaded them on buses for the 200-mile trip to Mobile. There they testified before a grand jury about whom they had voted for and who had helped them read and mark their ballots. The contradictory and confusing testimony produced by these intimidating tactics contributed to the Selma jurors' rejection of the government's case.

The acquittals in Selma have temporarily stymied the Reagan Administration's attempt to intimidate black voters in the Deep South, but voting fraud investigations are still going on in four other predominately black counties. On June 11, five people in Greene County were indicted on charges similar to the ones made against the Marion Three, and they are scheduled for trial in Birmingham at the end of August. Among the indicted are longtime civil rights stalwart and Southern Christian Leadership Conference board member Spiver Gordon and the Mayor of the town of Union, James Colvin. Lawyers for the defense of the five activists are being gathered by Alabama State Senator Hank Sanders, a black who owes his seat to the voting rights movement.

In the meantime, black citizens from Greene, Lowndes, Perry, Sumter and Wilcox counties have filed a Federal class-action suit asking for a halt to the Justice Department's activities. "We think it's unfair the way the current investigations are being conducted and feel this is the only way to let the people know what is going on," said Wilcox County Sheriff Prince Arnold, one of the plaintiffs. "We have complained for years to the Justice Department that white candidates have stolen elections through fraudulent use of absentee ballots, but there have been no investigations."

As Greene County Board of Education chair Carol Zippert, another plaintiff in the suit, put it: "During the last six months, teams of F.B.I. agents have come into these five counties and questioned more than a thousand black voters who cast absentee ballots in the 1984 election. Where were all these agents during the years when we were fighting for the right to vote?" □

Judgments

(*Continued From Front Cover*)

that the more closely one examines the record, the harder it is to make out where in the flow of events something that could reasonably be called a decision was reached at all. To be sure, a kind of consensus emerged from the sprawl of ideas and happenings that made up the climate of wartime Washington, but looking back, it is hard to distinguish those pivotal moments in the story when the crucial issues were identified, debated, reasoned through, resolved. The decision, to the extent that one can even speak of such a thing, was shaped and seasoned by a force very like inertia.

Let's say, then, that a wind began to blow, ever so gently at first, down the corridors along which power flows. And as it gradually gathered momentum during the course of the war, the people caught up in it began to assume, without ever checking up on it, that it had a logic and a motive, that it had been set in motion by sure hands acting on the basis of wise counsel.

Harry Truman, in particular, remembered it as a time of tough and lonely choices, and titled his memoir of that period *Year of Decisions*. But the bulk of those choices can in all fairness be said to have involved confirmation of projects already under way or implementation of decisions made at other levels of command. Brig. Gen. Leslie R. Groves, military head of the Manhattan Project, was close to the mark when he described Truman's decision as "one of noninterference—basically, a decision not to upset the existing plans." And J. Robert Oppenheimer spoke equally to the point when he observed some twenty years later: "The decision was implicit in the project. I don't know whether it could have been stopped."

In September of 1944, when it became more and more evident that a bomb would be produced in time for combat use, Franklin Roosevelt and Winston Churchill met at Hyde Park and initialed a brief *aide-mémoire*, noting, among other things, that the new weapon "might, perhaps, after mature consideration, be used against the Japanese." This document does not appear to have had any effect on the conduct of the war, and Truman knew nothing at all about it. But it would not have made a real difference in any case, for neither chief of state did much to initiate the "mature consideration" they spoke of so glancingly, and Truman, in turn, could only suppose that such matters had been considered already. "Truman did not inherit the question," writes Martin J. Sherwin, "he inherited the answer."

What would "mature consideration" have meant in such a setting as that anyway?

First of all, presumably, it would have meant seriously asking whether the weapon should be employed at all. But we have it on the authority of virtually all the principal players that no one in a position to do anything about it ever really considered alternatives to combat use. Henry L. Stimson, Secretary of War:

> At no time, from 1941 to 1945, did I ever hear it suggested by the President, or by any other responsible member of the government, that atomic energy should not be used in the war.

Harry Truman:

> I regarded the bomb as a military weapon and never had any doubt that it should be used.

General Groves:

> Certainly, there was no question in my mind, or, as far as I was ever aware, in the mind of either President Roosevelt or President Truman or any other responsible person, but that

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we were developing a weapon to be employed against the enemies of the United States.

Winston Churchill:

There never was a moment's discussion as to whether the atomic bomb should be used or not.

And why should anyone be surprised? We were at war, after all, and with the most resolute of enemies, so the unanimity of that feeling is wholly understandable. But it was not, by any stretch of the imagination, a product of mature consideration.

"Combat use" meant a number of different things, however, and a second question began to be raised with some frequency in the final months of the war, all the more insistently after the defeat of Germany. Might a way be devised to demonstrate the awesome power of the bomb in a convincing enough fashion to induce the surrender of the Japanese without having to destroy huge numbers of civilians? Roosevelt may have been pondering something of the sort. In September of 1944, for example, three days after initialing the Hyde Park *aide-mémoire*, he asked Vannevar Bush, a trusted science adviser, whether the bomb "should actually be used against the Japanese or whether it should be used only as a threat." While that may have been little more than idle musing, a number of different schemes were explored within both the government and the scientific community in the months following.

One option involved a kind of *benign strike*: the dropping of a bomb on some built-up area, but only after advance notice had been issued so that residents could evacuate the area and leave an empty slate on which the bomb could write its terrifying signature. This plan was full of difficulties. A dud under those dramatic circumstances might do enormous damage to American credibility, and, moreover, to broadcast any warning was to risk the endeavor in other ways. Weak as the Japanese were by this time in the war, it was easy to imagine their finding a way to intercept an incoming airplane if they knew where and when it was expected, and officials in Washington were afraid that it would occur to the Japanese, as it had to them, that the venture would come to an abrupt end if American prisoners of war were brought into the target area.

The second option was a *tactical strike* against a purely military target—an arsenal, railroad yard, depot, factory, harbor—without advance notice. Early in the game, for example, someone had nominated the Japanese fleet concentration at Truk. The problem with this notion, however—and there is more than a passing irony here—was that no known military target had a wide enough compass to contain the whole of the destructive capacity of the weapon and so display its full range and power. The committee inquiring into likely targets wanted one "more than three miles in diameter," because anything smaller would be too inadequate a canvas for the picture it was supposed to hold.

The third option was to stage a kind of *dress rehearsal* by detonating a bomb in some remote corner of the world—a desert or empty island, say—to exhibit to international observers brought in for the purpose what the device could

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do. The idea had been proposed by a group of scientists in what has since been called the Franck Report, but it commanded no more than a moment's attention. It had the same problems as the benign strike: the risk of being embarrassed by a dud was more than most officials in a position to decide were willing to take, and there was a widespread feeling that any demonstration involving advance notice would give the enemy too much useful information.

The fourth option involved a kind of *warning shot*. The thought here was to drop a bomb without notice over a relatively uninhabited stretch of enemy land so that the Japanese high command might see at first hand what was in store for them if they failed to surrender soon. Edward Teller thought that an explosion at night high over Tokyo Bay would serve as a brilliant visual argument, and Adm. Lewis Strauss, soon to become a member (and later chair) of the Atomic Energy Commission, recommended a strike on a local forest, reasoning that the blast would "lay the trees out in windrows from the center of the explosion in all directions as though they were matchsticks," meanwhile igniting a fearsome firestorm at the epicenter. "It seemed to me," he added, "that a demonstration of this sort would prove to the Japanese that we could destroy any of their cities at will." The physicist Ernest O. Lawrence may have been speaking half in jest when he suggested that a bomb might be used to "blow the top off" Mount Fujiyama, but he was quite serious when he assured a friend early in the war: "The bomb will never be dropped on people. As soon as we get it, we'll use it only to dictate peace."

Now, hindsight is too easy a talent. But it seems evident on the face of it that the fourth of those options, the warning shot, was much to be preferred over the other three, and even more to be preferred over use on living targets. I do not want to argue the case here. I do want to ask, however, why that possibility was so easily dismissed.

The fact of the matter seems to have been that the notion of a demonstration was discussed on only a few occasions once the Manhattan Project neared completion, and most of those discussions were off the record. So a historian trying to reconstruct the drift of those conversations can only flatten an ear against the wall, as it were, and see if any sense can be made of the muffled voices next door. It seems very clear, for example, that the options involving advance notice were brought up so often and so early in official conversations that they came to *mean* demonstration in the minds of several important players. If a James Byrnes, say, soon to be named Secretary of State, were asked why one could not detonate a device in unoccupied territory, he might raise the problem posed by prisoners of war, and if the same question were asked of a James Bryant Conant, another science adviser, he might speak of the embarrassment that would follow a dud—thus, in both cases, joining ideas that had no logical relation to each other. Neither prisoners of war nor fear of failure, of course, posed any argument against a surprise demonstration.

There were two occasions, however, on which persons in a position to affect policy discussed the idea of a nonlethal demonstration. Those two conversations together consumed no more than a matter of minutes, so far as one can tell at this remove, and they, too, were off the record. But they seem to represent virtually the entire investment of the government of the United States in "mature consideration" of the subject.

The first discussion took place at a meeting of what was then called the Interim Committee, a striking gathering of military, scientific and government brass under the chairmanship of Secretary Stimson. This group, which included James Byrnes and Chief of Staff Gen. George C. Marshall, met on a number of occasions in May of 1945 to discuss policy issues raised by the new bomb, and Stimson recalled later that at one of their final meetings the members "carefully considered such alternatives as a detailed advance warning or a demonstration in some uninhabited area." But the minutes of the meeting, as well as the accounts of those present, suggest otherwise. The only exchange on the subject, in fact, took place during a luncheon break, and while we have no way of knowing what was actually said in that conversation, we do know what conclusion emerged from it. One participant, Arthur H. Compton, recalled later:

> Though the possibility of a demonstration that would not destroy human lives was attractive, no one could suggest a way in which it could be made so convincing that it would be likely to stop the war.

And the recording secretary of the meeting later recalled:

> Dr. Oppenheimer . . . said he doubted whether there could be devised any sufficiently startling demonstration that would convince the Japanese they ought to throw in the sponge.

Two weeks later, four physicists who served as advisers to the Interim Committee met in Los Alamos to consider once again the question of demonstration. They were Arthur Compton, Enrico Fermi, Ernest Lawrence and Robert Oppenheimer—as distinguished an assembly of scientific talent as could be imagined—and they concluded, after a discussion of which we have no record: "We can propose no technical demonstration likely to bring an end to the war; we see no acceptable alternative to direct military use." That, so far as anyone can tell, was the end of it.

We cannot be sure that a milder report would have made a difference, for the Manhattan Project was gathering momentum as it moved toward the more steeply pitched inclines of May and June, but we can be sure that the idea of a demonstration was at that point spent. The Los Alamos report ended with something of a disclaimer ("We have, however, no claim to special competence. . . ."), but its message was clear enough. When asked about that report nine years later in his security hearings, Oppenheimer said, with what might have been a somewhat defensive edge in his voice, "We did not think exploding one of those things as a firecracker over the desert was likely to be very impressive."

Perhaps not. But those fragments are telling for another reason. If you listen to them carefully for a moment or two, you realize that these are the voices of nuclear physicists trying to imagine how a strange and distant people will react to an atomic blast. These are the voices of nuclear physicists

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dealing with psychological and anthropological questions about Japanese culture, Japanese temperament, Japanese will to resist—topics, we must assume, about which they knew almost nothing. They did not know yet what the bomb could actually do, since its first test was not to take place for another month. But in principle, at least, Oppenheimer and Fermi reflecting on matters relating to the Japanese national character should have had about the same force as Ruth Benedict and Margaret Mead reflecting on matters relating to high-energy physics, the first difference being that Benedict and Mead would not have presumed to do so, and the second being that no one in authority would have listened to them if they had.

The first of the two morals I want to draw from the foregoing—this being a parable, after all—is that in moments of critical contemplation, it is often hard to know where the competencies of soldiers and scientists and all the rest of us begin and end. Many an accidental judgment can emerge from such confusions.

But what if the conclusions of the scientists had been correct? What if some kind of demonstration had been staged in a lightly occupied part of Japan and it *had* been greeted as a firecracker in the desert? What then?

Let me shift gears for a moment and discuss the subject in another way. It is standard wisdom for everyone in the United States old enough to remember the war, and for most of those to whom it is ancient history, that the bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki were the only alternative to an all-out invasion of the Japanese mainland involving hundreds of thousands and perhaps millions of casualties on both sides. Unless the Japanese came to understand the need to surrender quickly, we would have been drawn by an almost magnetic force toward those dreaded beaches. This has become an almost automatic pairing of ideas, an article of common lore. If you lament that so many civilians were incinerated or blown to bits in Hiroshima and Nagasaki, then somebody will remind you of the American lives thus saved. Truman was the person most frequently asked to account for the bombings, and his views were emphatic on the subject:

> It was a question of saving hundreds of thousands of American lives. I don't mind telling you that you don't feel normal when you have to plan hundreds of thousands of complete, final deaths of American boys who are alive and joking and having fun while you are doing your planning. You break your heart and your head trying to figure out a way to save one life. The name given to our invasion plan was "Olympic," but I saw nothing godly about the killing of all the people that would be necessary to make that invasion. I could not worry about what history would say about my personal morality. I made the only decision I ever knew how to make. I did what I thought was right.*

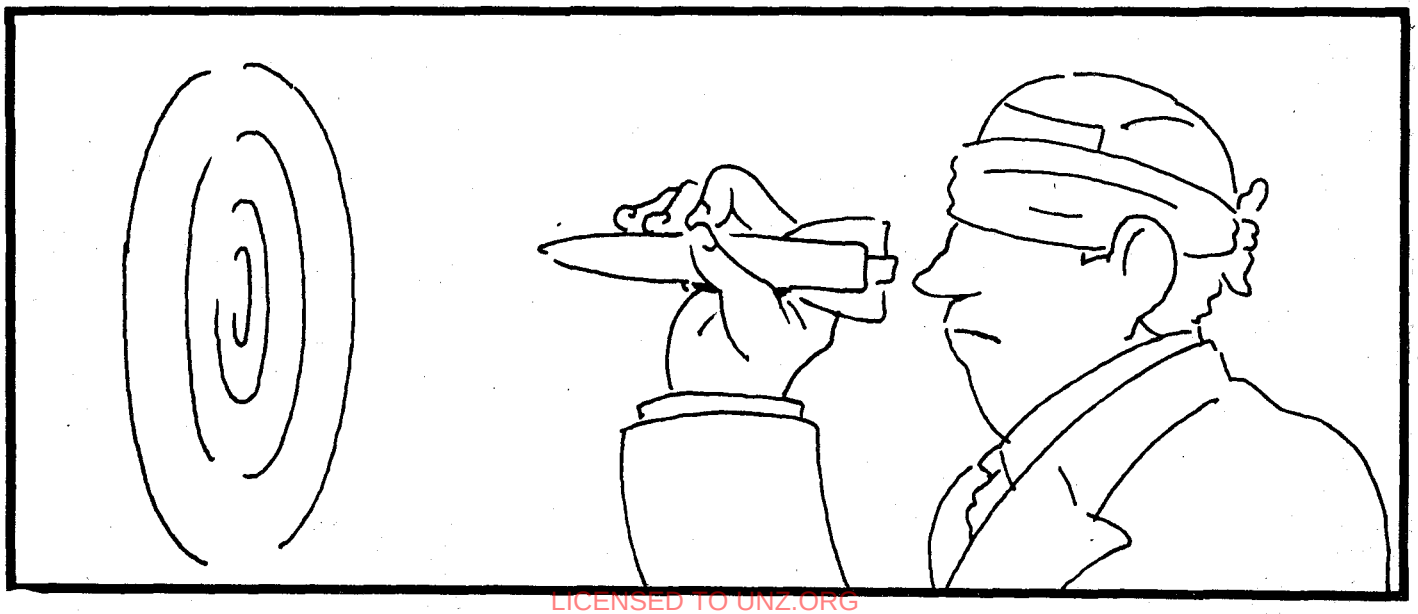
Veterans of the war, and particularly those who had reason to suppose that they would have been involved in an invasion, have drawn that same connection repeatedly, most recently Paul Fussell in the pages of *The New Republic*. Thank God for the bomb, the argument goes, it saved the lives of countless numbers of us. And so, in a sense, it may have.

But the destruction of Hiroshima and Nagasaki had nothing to do with it. It only makes sense to assume, even if few people were well enough positioned in early August to see the situation whole, that there simply was not going to be an invasion. Not ever.

For what sane power, with the atomic weapon securely in its arsenal, would hurl a million or more of its sturdiest young men on a heavily fortified mainland? To imagine

* Merle Miller notes, in *Plain Speaking: An Oral Biography of Harry S. Truman*, that Truman may have had moments of misgiving: "My only insight into Mr. Truman's feeling about the Bomb and its dropping, and it isn't much, came one day in his private library at the Truman Memorial Library. In one corner was every book ever published on the Bomb, and at the end of one was Horatio's speech in the last scene of *Hamlet*." Truman had underlined these words:

> And let me speak to the yet unknowing world
> How these things came about. So shall you hear
> Of carnal, bloody, and unnatural acts,
> Of accidental judgments, casual slaughters,
> Of deaths put on by cunning and forced cause,
> And, in this upshot, purposes mistook
> Fall'n on the inventors' heads.



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anyone ordering an invasion when the means were at hand to blast Japan into a sea of gravel at virtually no cost in American lives is to imagine a madness beyond anything even the worst of war can induce. The invasion had not yet been called off, granted. But it surely would have been, and long before the November 1 deadline set for it.

The United States did not become a nuclear power on August 6, with the destruction of Hiroshima. It became a nuclear power on July 16, when the first test device was exploded in Alamogordo, New Mexico. Uncertainties remained, of course, many of them. But from that moment on, the United States knew how to produce a bomb, knew how to deliver it and knew it would work. Stimson said shortly after the war that the bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki "ended the ghastly specter of a clash of great land armies," but he could have said, with greater justice, that the ghastly specter ended at Alamogordo. Churchill came close to making exactly that point when he first learned of the New Mexico test:

> To quell the Japanese resistance man by man and conquer the country yard by yard might well require the loss of a million American lives and half that number of British. . . . Now all that nightmare picture had vanished.

It *had* vanished. The age of inch-by-inch crawling over enemy territory, the age of Guadalcanal and Iwo Jima and Okinawa, was just plain over.

The point is that once we had the bomb and were committed to its use, the terrible weight of invasion no longer hung over our heads. The Japanese were incapable of mounting any kind of offensive, as every observer has agreed, and it was our option when to close with the enemy and thus risk casualties. So we could have easily afforded to hold for a moment, to think it over, to introduce what Dwight Eisenhower called "that awful thing" to the world on the basis of something closer to mature consideration. We could have afforded to detonate a bomb over some less lethal target and then pause to see what happened. And do it a second time, maybe a third. And if none of those demonstrations had made a difference, presumably we would have had to strike harder: Hiroshima and Nagasaki would still have been there a few weeks later for that purpose, silent and untouched—"unspoiled" was the term Gen. H.H. Arnold used—for whatever came next. Common lore also has it that there were not bombs enough for such niceties, but that seems not to have been the case. The United States was ready to deliver a third bomb toward the end of August, and Groves had already informed Marshall and Stimson that three or four more bombs would be available in September, a like number in October, at least five in November, and seven in December, with substantial increases to follow in early 1946. Even if we assume that Groves was being too hopeful about the productive machinery he had set in motion, as one expert close to the matter has suggested, a formidable number of bombs would have been available by the date originally set for invasion.

Which brings us back to the matter of momentum. The best way to tell the story of those days is to say that the "decision to drop" had become a force like gravity. It had taken life. The fact that it existed supplied its meaning, its reason for being. Elting E. Morison, Stimson's biographer, put it well:

> Any process started by men toward a special end tends, for reasons logical, biological, aesthetic or whatever they may be, to carry forward, if other things remain equal, to its climax. [This is] the inertia developed in a human system. . . . In a process where such a general tendency has been set to work it is difficult to separate the moment when men were still free to choose from the moment, if such there was, when they were no longer free to choose.

I have said very little about Nagasaki so far because it was not the subject of any thought at all. The orders of the bomber command were to attack Japan as soon as the bombs were ready. One was ready on August 9. Boom. When Groves was later asked why the attack on Nagasaki had come so soon after the attack on Hiroshima, leaving so little time for the Japanese to consider what had happened to them, he simply said: "Once you get your opponent reeling, you keep him reeling and never let him recover." And that is the point, really. There is no law of nature that compels a winning side to press its superiority, but it is hard to slow down, hard to relinquish an advantage, hard to rein the fury. The impulse to charge ahead, to strike at the throat, is so strong a habit of war that it almost ranks as a reflex, and if that thought does not frighten us when we consider our present nuclear predicament, nothing will. Many a casual slaughter can emerge from such moods.

If it is true, as I have suggested, that there were few military or logistic reasons for striking as sharply as we did and that the decision to drop moved in on the crest of an almost irreversible current, then it might be sensible to ask, on the fortieth anniversary of the event, what some of the drifts were that became a part of that larger current. An adequate accounting would have to consider a number of military, political and other matters far beyond the reach of this brief essay, the most important of them by far being the degree to which the huge shadow of the Soviet Union loomed over both official meetings and private thoughts. It is nearly impossible to read the remaining record without assuming that the wish to make a loud announcement to the Russians was a persuasive factor in the minds of many of the principal participants. There were other drifts as well, of course, and I would like to note a few of the sort that sometimes occur to social scientists.

For one thing, an extraordinary amount of money and material had been invested in the Manhattan Project—both of them in short supply in a wartime economy—and many observers thought that so large a public expense would be all the more willingly borne if it were followed by a striking display of what the money had been spent for.

And, too, extraordinary investments had been made in men and talent, both of them in short supply in a wartime economy. The oldest of the people involved in the Manhattan Project—soldiers, engineers and scientists—made sacrifices in the form of separated families, interrupted careers and a variety of other discomforts, and it makes a

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certain psychological sense that a decisive strike would serve as a kind of vindication for all the trouble. The youngest of them, though, had been held out of combat, thus avoiding the fate of so many men of their generation, by accidents of professional training, personal skill and sheer timing. The project was their theater of war, and it makes even more psychological sense that some of them would want the only shot they fired to be a truly resonant one.

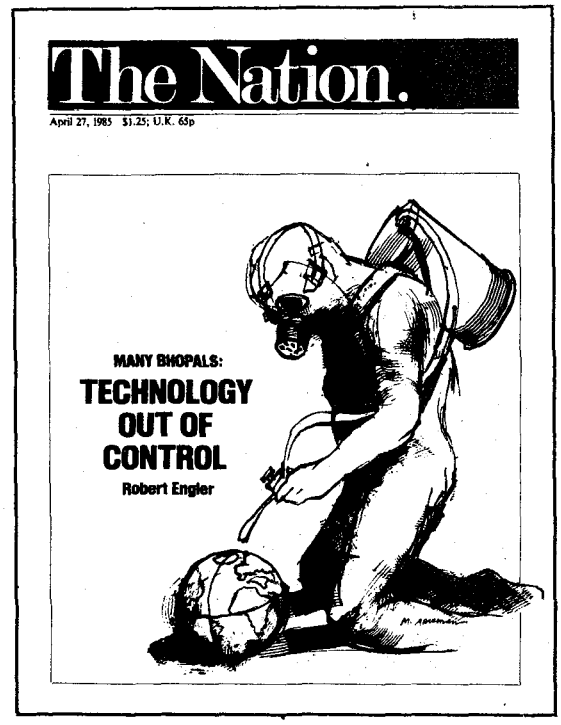
The dropping of such a bomb, moreover, could serve as an ending, something sharp and distinct in a world that had become ever more blurred. The Grand Alliance was breaking up, and with it all hope for a secure postwar world. Roosevelt was dead. The future was full of ambiguity. And, most important, everybody was profoundly tired. In circumstances like that, a resounding strike would serve to clarify things, to give them form, to tidy them up a bit.

There are other matters one might point to, some of them minor, some of them major, all of them strands in the larger weave. There was a feeling, expressed by scientists and government officials alike, that the world needed a rude and decisive shock to awaken it to the realities of the atomic age. There was a feeling, hard to convey in words but easy to sense once one has become immersed in some of the available material, that the bomb had so much power and majesty, was so compelling a force, that one was almost required to give it birth and a chance to mature. There was a feeling, born of war, that for all its ferocity the atomic bomb was nevertheless no more than a minor increment on a scale of horror that already included the firebombings of Tokyo and other Japanese cities. And there was a feeling, also born of war, that living creatures on the other side, even the children, had somehow lost title to the mercies that normally accompany the fact of being human.

The kinds of points I have been making need to be stated either very precisely or in some detail. I have not yet learned to do the former; I do not have space enough here for the latter. So let me just end with the observation that human decisions do not always emerge from reflective counsels where facts are arrayed in order and logic is the prevailing currency of thought. They emerge from complex fields of force, in which the vanities of leaders and the moods of constituencies and the inertias of bureaucracies play a critical part. That is as important a lesson as one can learn from the events of 1945—and as unnerving a one.

The bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki supply a rich case study for people who must live in times like ours. It is not important for us to apportion shares of responsibility to persons who played their parts so long ago, and I have not meant to do so here: these were unusually decent and compassionate people for the most part, operating with reflexes that had been tempered by war. We need to attend to such histories as this, however, because they provide the clearest illustrations we have of what human beings can do—this being the final moral to be drawn from our parable—when they find themselves in moments of crisis and literally have more destructive power at their disposal than they know what to do with. That is as good an argument for disarming as any that can be imagined. □

MANY BHOPALS
TECHNOLOGY
OUT OF CONTROL



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BOOKS & THE ARTS.

Living Matter

ANN SNITOW

THE PERIODIC TABLE. *By Primo Levi. Translated by Raymond Rosenthal. Schocken. 233 pp. $16.95.*

SURVIVAL IN AUSCHWITZ: The Nazi Assault on Humanity. *By Primo Levi. Translated by Stuart Woolf. Macmillan. 157 pp. Paper $3.95.*

IF NOT NOW, WHEN? *By Primo Levi. Translated by William Weaver. Summit. 349 pp. $15.95.*

The Periodic Table, an account by the Italian chemist Primo Levi of his lifelong passion for his trade, is a profoundly original contribution to the genre of "the life." Although the elements of the chemist's periodic chart are ostensibly his focus, he is a wonderful writer on whatever subject, and one soon comes to trust him to locate living matter in any compound of experience. However, the particular story history has forced on Levi is not his so much as it is the story of the very rationality he loves run amok, the incalculable violence of our whole century. Extreme circumstances have pushed and shoved this story into the form of a representative narrative, a study of what can be said, what inwardly known, about the ghastly experiences typical of our time.

In Piedmont in Levi's boyhood, being Jewish meant little more than having odd elderly relatives, inconspicuous but eccentric Jews who made do with the middling welcome of Turin but who could fall back on their own exotic jargon. Hebrew words entered the shops with the cloth delivered at the back door, where no one bothered to make the anti-Semitic gesture of resisting them, so that *na vesta a kinim* was a polka-dot dress, and the small fact that *kinim* are lice was comfortably forgotten.

World War II interrupted this bland and gradual pattern of assimilation. *The Periodic Table*, which should have been the life of a chemist madly in love with work, a happy hero enjoying a tussle with "stupid matter," with the "deception, fraud, bedazzlement" of a deliciously shifting world, became instead a story with a hole in it, and that hole is Auschwitz.

Wonderful in itself, *The Periodic Table* has as its necessary shadow book *Survival in Auschwitz*. Levi's life was wrenched into these two parts, and he cannot get them together between one set of covers. Or, rather, he refuses the assimilation. Still, the books belong together, intractable countertales that they are, one about a man's yen to dismantle nature, the other about the dismantling of a man. And their very different power comes from essential similarities of style: both are organized in mysteriously potent clusters of association.

Survival in Auschwitz was Levi's effort at self-repair after the war. First published by a small press in Italy in 1947, the book is one of the great works by a survivor. Levi set himself the task of the chemist: to analyze the elements, to understand how they work together. He recommends a certain silence on the subject of Providence in our century—and is disgusted when one inmate thanks his God for a momentary reprieve from being chosen for death. He tries instead to find a value system based on a painstaking regard for the details of daily experience. Perhaps, he reasons, we will find meaning here, but no overarching myth is offered or hoped for:

> [On the first day,] driven by thirst, I eyed a fine icicle outside the window, within hand's reach. I opened the window and broke off the icicle but at once a large, heavy guard prowling outside brutally snatched it away from me. "Warum?" I asked him in my poor German. "Hier ist kein warum" (there is no why here), he replied, pushing me inside with a shove.
>
> The explanation is repugnant but simple: in this place everything is forbidden, not for hidden reasons, but because the camp has been created for that purpose.

Each aspect of Auschwitz—the journey there, the first scalding shower followed by the first naked run in the cold, the first amazing blow delivered out of duty, not anger, the hard wooden shoes and the hideous sores on the feet so likely to lead from infection to sickness to death, the routine of the morning and of the night—is called up with hallucinatory but unembellished intensity. This is writing with *claritas*, glistening inevitability. It never asks us to feel more than we authentically can, but the prose succeeds in gluing us to the *being there*.

Levi's realism—saving literal bits of what was said and done from the burning—is a realism that constantly explores and acknowledges its own limits. The facts alone are inert; they are death. Life resides in acts of interpretation; but interpretation must never substitute for the intractable facts. Levi keeps riding around on this circular thought, for Auschwitz is a dizzying place, "a great machine to reduce us to beasts." He shapes his prose around this tension between the urge to understand and such boundaries to thinking as hunger, cold, terror, bestial numbness.

Equilibrium characterizes all Levi writes. He could easily conclude that "man is fundamentally brutal, egoistic and stupid" but instead takes a quieter but more interesting lesson from Auschwitz: "In the face of driving necessity and physical disabilities many social habits and instincts are reduced to silence." Without shame, he describes his own abjectness along with everyone else's, and without self-loathing or self-aggrandizement he accepts the arbitrary, unlikely fact of his own survival. "Driving necessity," "physical disability," the harsh laws of social and physical power that rule the camp—Levi gives them all their large place without ever resigning his belief that the fragility of human solidarity makes it more, not less precious.

The Periodic Table, finished in 1975, many years after the Auschwitz memoir (and only recently available here, in a beautiful translation by Raymond Rosenthal), is a record of the man who has come through. Auschwitz was his nightmare, but he has awakened to find that instead of being doomed to waste himself, he is in full possession of his faculties, vital, intelligent, fascinated by the variety of experience waiting beyond the little death inside the prison walls. To be awake: this is in itself the greatest pleasure. Levi's autobiography vibrates with his delight at seeing, at understanding the hidden sources of what he sees, at finding the underground connections

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that link all matter. In *Survival in Auschwitz*, the material was organized around certain core experiences: "Initiation," "Our Nights," "The Work." Here, chapters are "Argon," "Hydrogen," "Zinc," "Iron," and in their way, these words call up memories and long, looping trains of thought as rich and powerful as any evoked in the shadow book.

For example, under "Zinc," Levi remembers first the ferocious Professor P., in whose laboratory he prepared zinc sulfate. Levi admired P., who was a savage, a hunter, a social Darwinist but who was also—out of sheer love of independence—an anti-Fascist. Levi remembers the delight in his own ability to stay the difficult course set by P., but he never shared his professor's taste for blood or his contempt for those weaker ones who failed in the attack on zinc.

> Zinc, Zinck, zinco: they make tubs out of it for laundry, it is not an element which says much to the imagination, it is gray and its salts are colorless, it is not toxic, nor does it produce striking chromatic reactions; in short, it is a boring metal.

But the savage hunter must not get so complacent. Zinc, which should have been easy to blend with acid, resisted the young Levi's assault: "The hour of the appointment with Matter, the Spirit's great antagonist, had struck." It turns out that the "so tender and delicate zinc," when very pure, obstinately resists yielding to the acid preparation.

> One could draw from this two conflicting philosophical conclusions: the praise of purity, which protects from evil like a coat of mail; the praise of impurity, which gives rise to changes, in other words, to life. I discarded the first, disgustingly moralistic, and I lingered to consider the second, which I found more congenial. In order for the wheel to turn, for life to be lived, impurities are needed . . . Fascism does not want them, forbids them, and that's why you're not a Fascist; it wants everybody to be the same, and you are not.

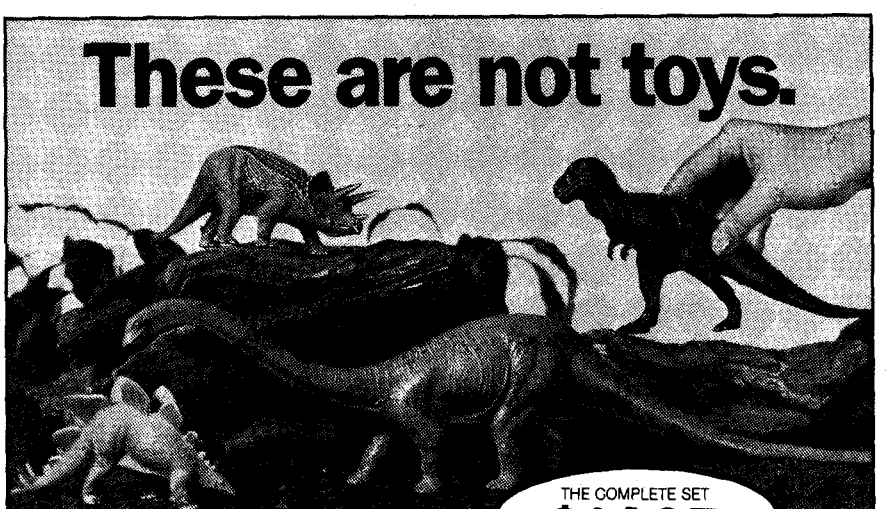
"Zinc" ends with Rita, who is also there, in the lab, working with zinc, so there can be a "small zinc bridge" to Levi's other desire, "a woman's smile." Rita and Primo are almost uncombinable elements: he is "intoxicated," "disjointed," Jewish, "the impurity that makes the zinc react"; she is more inert, "thin, pale, sad, and sure of herself." The victory of the day is finally that over Rita's reluctance. When he takes her arm, two resistant elements join. Zinc is only the beginning in a lifetime tested by many surprising catalytic agents, enriched by unlikely moments of contact.

Auschwitz rarely comes closer to the center of Levi's memoir than this, yet *The Periodic Table* contains traces of all the traumas now digested. As a young man, Levi sought mastery, but his encounter with the *Übermenschen* refined his boyhood passions, leaving wisdom as the distillate in the clear glass flask.

In constrast, Levi's recent novel, *If Not Now, When?* is from a much more familiar strain of Holocaust literature. All the "world of our fathers" books are marked by a certain atmosphere of romance, of heroic evocation. They seek continuity with a Jewish past, but they are also records of discontinuity, loss, strangeness. While in Auschwitz, Levi's casual Jewishness received its inevitable cauterization. In *If Not Now, When?* he has written of those Jews who were the not-I, the Eastern European ones for whom Jewishness had always meant more than "a small amusing anomaly, like having a crooked nose or freckles." *If Not Now, When?* is a sort of reparation, a tribute to those Jews Levi feels he knows too superficially, the Jews he met in the cauldron, who died there. In solace—for them and for himself—he dreams of them as fighters: Let them rise up.

Jewish literature is thick with such stories. In her *Hasidic Tales of the Holocaust*, Yaffa Eliach tells this typical tale-in-miniature: The Jews in the *shtetl* argued about whether or not to resist. Some said, "Let us not walk as sheep to the slaughter," but the others prevailed, and all were led to the old Jewish cemetery and ordered to stand naked at the edge of open ditches. Zvi, aged 16, held his father's hand, counted the intervals between the volleys of bullets and jumped just before the fire hit him. "He felt the bodies piling on top of him. . . . He felt the streams of blood around him and the trembling pile of dying bodies moving beneath him."

In the dead of night, Zvi crept out naked and bloody, and he knocked at



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CRETE: AUGUST

To have been in the aspect of love
and let go, is to encounter

the imagination, for it fills the space
of days, and fires the landscape.

Like yesterday while walking home,
the sun shadowing the backside

of these cliffs that spine this island
I thought I saw your profile

in what was really a mountain.
And later, on the footpath

through the quilt-work valley, swallows
in twilight feeding frenzy, and grapes

abundant where spit wouldn't hold,
I felt the presence of another.

But only air, the vapid whispering
of air, between the thyme, the thistle.

Funny for when we shared a bed
and ate from the same round table

(a telephone cable spool, remember?)
you were "taken for granted,"

regarded as just one cog
among the many geared tedium

of dailiness: work by nine,
the petty, the homogenous dinner routines.

Yet how we needed each other.
I could tell you what pained me,

and you to me, and we sometimes
were silent together, all of which conspired

to make confusing the miracle.
Now in this blackness punctuated

by a moon and the misty glow
that is Pitsedia braced in the concave

of the hills up ahead, I long
to smell the clean sharp wine

of our lovemaking linger on my lip,
to have the cusp of your breast cupped

in my hand, tangible
as this tarred asphalt road is hard

and hot in the swelter of days.
And if you were to return

it would be through a joyous humility
that I would do good, but being

as it is, I will prosper
through a sadness for you

who is everywhere ghosted
and nowhere to be.

Ron Lieber

the doors of Christian peasants: "Jew, go back to the grave where you belong." Finally, desperate, he told a peasant woman, "I am your Lord, Jesus Christ. . . . Look at me—the blood, the pain, the suffering of the innocent." Believing him, the woman gave Zvi food and clothes and kept his secret. Zvi escaped to the forest and "thus, the Jewish partisan movement was born."

From this kind of mythic material, Levi has conjured up his particular version of the heroic tale, the exciting story of one Mendel, a watchmaker, who joins with other Jews in a series of picaresque partisan adventures. Such things really happened: thousands lived in the woods, from hand to mouth, and found ways to resist. Levi's partisans are real, chewy, well-drawn characters, but this book has the magic that color landscapes get when seen from a distance. It is a romance.

Levi gives the partisans a verve and resilience we all dream of in adversity. Here is the book in which an assimilated Italian Jew tries out an irrepressible Yiddishkeit. Sometimes the rhythm wavers (or is this the translation?) but often the voice works. These are Jews determined not only to survive but to "do the maximum damage to the Germans, and go to Palestine." One says, "I'm not used to walking away from roads," but Mendel replies, "Well, you'll learn here. I wasn't born in the midst of the woods, either. . . . The only wood in the history of Israel is the Earthly Paradise, and you know how that ended up. Then nothing for another six thousand years." Another urbanite intrigued by wildness, Levi gives us memorable scenes of the Jewish partisans in misty swamps, hiding their fires beneath trees, forging a polyglot solidarity. "They had learned how a gun was made from an encyclopedia," and they lived down the proverb "A Jew punches you on the nose and then cries for help."

Readers of Levi's other books will feel a difference here and will quite necessarily make a distinction. But *If Not Now, When?* reads fast and well, is a thriller of sorts, full of melodrama, danger, suspense and surprising incident. Without invidious comparison to his subtler volumes, the novel can stand on its feet and join the library of Jewish love stories, stories that try to talk back to the world as if with the tongues of those in their graves. □

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ART.

ARTHUR C. DANTO

Kurt Schwitters

Whoever has visited any representative collection of modern European art, and especially of the paintings of the 1920s, will have encountered—and remembered—two or three of Kurt Schwitters's unmistakable collages, or *Merzbilder*, as he called them. They are memorable in part because they are composed of fragments of things commonly so submerged in the transactions of daily life as to be beneath notice: who remembers what a bus transfer really says, or a movie ticket, or a parking stub, or the receipts from cash machines which we check out only to confirm our incapacity to balance our accounts, and then crumple? Such bits and pieces form the compost of our goings and comings. Were we to retain each of the ephemeral scraps we jettison—the tissues and wrappers, the receipts and tickets, the bills and memos, vouchers, coupons and chits, the stubs, butts and inches of paper tape, the leaflets advertising sordid services, not to mention the business cards, front pages of glimpsed newspapers, napkins sanitary and unsanitary, disposable containers, paper cups, matchbooks printed with meretricious enticements, the carefully crushed and torn carbon interleaves of credit-card payments, and all of this made thicker by lost buttons, broken shoelaces, toothless combs, fallen bobby pins, sprung rubber bands, plastic spoons, wooden stirrers, soda straws, small change, tokens, emptied tubes and wasted condoms—we would have the mute inadvertent autobiography of anyone at all on a day like every other.

There is more to the *Merzbild* than the aggregated anonymous and unconscious memorabilia of Schwitters's contemporaries, but one's initial sharp impression is that he has made into a form of art the compulsive, almost journalistic snatching up of unconsidered trifles. How much more there is to him, and how much more complex, accordingly, the interpretation of even a single collage must be, might never have been evident to more than two or three scholars of the interchange between Dada and Russian Constructivism without an exhibition as remarkable and inspired as the retrospective on view at the Museum of Modern Art in New York City (through October 1). Few can have been prepared for the oceanic ferocity of his creativity, or for the sustained polymorphism of his single artistic—or, more accurately, his single philosophical—idea. The name he gave that idea was *Merz*, partly to insist that his impulses were not to be assimilated to those of the Dadaists but more exactly to designate not so much a philosophy of art as a philosophy *as* art, of which he was more or less the sole practitioner. So closely did he identify with this philosophy-as-a-form-of-art that he said, in an important apologia of 1919, "Now I call myself MERZ." The idea sustained him through decades, while, true to his obsession with banality, he sought to live, almost as an act of artistic will, an irreproachably bourgeois life in a period marked by inflation, depression, social upheaval, cultural cataclysm, political oppression, exile, decrepitude, loss and death. In order to understand *Merz*, it is critical to see that it was more than an avant-garde prank, vintage 1920. It was, in fact, nearly a religious calling.

There exists, alas only in a grainy snapshot, a work whose title is "HAUS MERZ." It consists of a wooden base in which "HAUS MERZ" is incised, together with a date—20—and the initials K.S. Signature, title and date are part of the work, testifying that it is a work of art. Mounted on the base is a tiny model of a church, with a toy top as spire, a nondescript block of wood as the tower it completes, and a button for the clockface. Behind is an open nave, composed chiefly of some clockwork gears, under a roof that looks as though it may once have been a blade of some sort from a scraper. It is not a typical *Merz* work because of the transformations: the button is displaced by its role as a clock, the block as tower, the top as spire, the blade as roof. These are the sort of visual puns we are familiar with from Picasso, who made a chimpanzee's head from a toy automobile and a goat's body from a wicker basket, and who drew a woman's breasts as a pair of teacups. Such metaphoric transformations, in which something is shown as another concrete object while retaining its identity as a button or a top, are unusual for Schwitters. Customarily, in *Merz*, an object, keeping its identity to be sure, is transformed only into part of

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an often quite abstract work of art. But "HAUS MERZ" is a work made up of puns—"the lowest form of humor"—and it is essential to interpreting the work that something as low as a pun should be perceived as the substance of something as elevated as a church, let alone a work of art. The title/inscription is itself a pun: "HAUS MERZ" plays on "*Ausmerz*," which would mean something that has been culled. The verb "*ausmerzen*" means to cull out, and the term "*merz*" occurs only in compound words, such as "*Merzschafe*," a culled sheep, or "*Merzvieh*," a culled piece of livestock. It implies rejection, as of something picked out because it's not up to the mark. "*Merzhaus*," if the expression existed, would designate a faulty house. On Long Island there is an eating place actually called The Cull House, which, if it lived up to its name, would serve culled seafood: lobsters with missing claws, clams with broken shells, fish of the sort that fishermen throw back as having no commercial value.

It is striking that Schwitters's first use of "*merz*" was cut out of the printed word "*Commerz*," an anglicized German expression that means "commercial," as in "commercial bank." (In fact, he cut it out of "*Commerz- und Privat-Bank.*") But since he was using in his collages only such words as could be culled out of newspapers, posters, handouts, labels and the like, there was probably no way he could have found "*merz*" save as part of "*Commerz*" (or perhaps "*Merzurizaten*," "mercerization," if that process was common at the time). The verb "*merzen*" is obsolete and can be found only in large, expensive dictionaries, a circumstance inconsistent with the concept of *Merz*. The word "*Commerz*," if you wish, is an instance of *Merz* which also contains the latter as part of itself, though not as part of its meaning. (Think of the way "cat" occurs as part of the word "cattle" or "she" as part of the word "sheep," without in either case being parts of the meanings of the words that contain them.)

Now the irony of *Merz* as practiced by Schwitters is that it is an act of including those things that have been excluded by culling: it is like a club made of those who are not members of other clubs, a *salon des refusés*, or, paradoxically, a class whose members have no other class in common—a kind of classless society. How appropriate, then, how quintessentially Christian, that a church should be a *Merz Haus*, a congregation of nobodies, of the outcast and downtrodden, the despised and rejected, of those who are so poor as to slip through the eyes of needles with room to spare, the last who shall be first, the inheriting meek. It is not surprising to learn from the densely documented catalogue by John Elderfield, director of the Department of Drawings at MOMA, who organized this show, that the unpretentious assemblage of loose parts that is "HAUS MERZ" should have been described by a friend of Schwitters as "the cathedral." Not a humble building made of humble building materials but humbleness itself raised through an act of artistic transfiguration to a structure for which we need the loftiest expression the language affords. Although it is untypical of Schwitters, for all his love of jokes and artistic fun, to have induced the Picasso-like transformation, here it is important that a discarded and unusable clockwork should fill the space of holiness. Usually in *Merz*, the tram ticket or candy wrapper remains itself while transfigured into art. I am impressed by how marvelously *Merz* succeeds where Christian iconography fails. Commonly, in the latter, the elevated are shown on clouds, the vestments of poverty stripped away in favor of celestial garments, the Christian artist having forgotten how central to his message lowness is and how it must be retained in any suitable transfiguration. I knew a woman who daydreamed as a girl in Russia of joining her family in America where, to be sure, she expected to scrub floors—but in a silk gown. A proper Christian representation should have figures bearing not the emblems of spectacular martyrdoms but those of grinding common labor: the scrub brush, the diaper, the skillet, the spade and pickax, the short hoe.

Schwitters claimed that a work of his specifically called "Das Merzbild" because of the occurrence in it of the fragment MERZ was the first of the genre of works he went on to call *Merzbilder*. According to his account it was called that simply because of the fragment it contained, the way another picture is called "Das Undbild" because of the occurrence in it of the word "*und*." I doubt it can be as simple as that, because *Merz* has the antecedent meaning I have described, which the subsequent *Merzbilder* all more or less exemplify, being made of culled detritus, and because "Das Merzbild" is already made up of culled bits, including the fragment MERZ. Like "HAUS MERZ," the "Merzbild" vanished, and the snapshot in which it holds a suitably banal immortality is too indistinct for us to be able to make out what its components were with any confidence. But there is an unmistakable piece of torn netting and what may be a shred of lace from

TWO SKULLS

We hope to sketch their bones, but do not want
their meat,
the stench floating through our house for days.
So, tonight we open the cold October dirt
and the moon shines down through the scarecrow's eyes.

The moon shines down through the scarecrow's eyes
and the cow skulls lower into the garden holes.
Dug up in the spring, flesh stripped worm-clean
in the April haze,
the bones, cast in clay, become our vessels.

And the cow skulls lower into the garden holes,
their eyes staring through us, still in place,
tongues bitten in two.
The bones, cast in clay, become our vessels,
our study of form, texture, color, tone.

Their eyes staring through us, still in place,
tongues bitten in two—
in silence we lean against our spades—
our study of form, texture, color tone—
then draw the dirt back over their eyes like shades.

Mary Swander

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what had been a veil or an undergarment. There may also be a comb. And, who knows, once MERZ was glued in, the artist may have been driven to complete what perhaps began as a routine abstract collage by seeking other objects to vindicate the title and the concept.

Whatever the case, the *Merzbilder* after that take their names from scraps they contain, often but not always a word, and it is difficult to suppose that any of them refer to what the word itself refers to. I doubt that many of them carry much external reference at all. But the scraps themselves are referential in that each exemplifies the concept of nondescriptness, of what would have been waste had it not been redeemed by and for art. The natural locus of these scraps is the ground on which unheeding heels will pound them into dust. Schwitters has lifted them up, one feels lovingly, and placed them as though precious in arrangements of great formal elegance and haunting beauty. The pictures are like heavenly choirs composed of waifs and strays, down-and-outs, odd balls in even holes, each allowed its own voice which then combines with the others in a surprising harmony. It is one of the most moving exhibitions I have ever seen.

What is even more moving than the work itself is the manner in which Schwitters is transfigured before our eyes into one of the great artists of the century. The transfiguration of the transfigurer could only have been achieved through an exhibition on this scale, in which the full range and reach of *Merz* is arrayed. Much has been lost. The "Merzbau," for example, which was a kind of interior transformation of his home in Hanover, comprising vaults and columns and grottoes, was bombed into what I should like to term "schwitters"—fragments of worn and shattered reality past any uses save those discovered by this artist as his art. He rescued banal expressions for literature, banal gestures for drama, and built for himself a life of banalities made precious by the surrounding collapse. Had the extent of his achievement been widely known, much of twentieth-century art would have been unnecessary, since it had already been done by him. He found forms and ways of combining forms that many have rediscovered but none have employed with anything like the vision, the abstract power, the charity, humanity and grace of this great soul. One gets a glimpse of what Kandinsky must have meant by the spiritual in art. □

MUSIC.

FRANK ROSE

The Smiths

One of the stranger rock-and-roll bands to emerge from England in this post-punk era is a quartet with the deceptively pedestrian moniker The Smiths. Like their name, The Smiths don't exactly look outrageous, but listen to them for a bit: soon Frankie Goes to Hollywood begins to sound like a retread party band and Boy George is revealed as a pleasant but altogether conventional crooner. However outlandish their get-up, none of those guys seem actively intent on rearranging our taboos. The Smiths, on the other hand, posit a world in which homosexuality is perfectly acceptable but eating a hamburger is akin to murder. They're also the only band I've heard with the wit to sing lines like, "No, I've never had a job/Because I'm too shy."

The shy one is Morrissey, the lyricist and singer, a starkly beautiful young man with an air of extreme sensitivity. In the past two years this frail orchid of a fellow has become a star of sufficient magnitude that his casual remarks on affairs of state—his voicing regret, for instance, that the bomb meant for Margaret Thatcher last year at Brighton didn't get her—have become front-page news. *Meat Is Murder*, The Smiths' latest album, entered the British charts at number one, and even in America The Smiths are hot items on the college and dance-club circuit. Yet musically as well as culturally, they remain unlikely candidates for the mainstream.

The sound of The Smiths is a difficult but strangely compelling amalgam of American blues and British folk set to a spinning beat. It's the work of guitarist Johnny Marr, whose off-center compositions serve as a perfect vehicle for Morrissey's ethereal quaverings. Morrissey doesn't sing with the tune, he sings all around it, and the resulting tension is as hypnotic as it is disorienting. Also his voice and Marr's guitar are capable of being simultaneously forthright and tremulous in a way that captures the essence of vulnerability. "I am human and I need to be loved/Just like everybody else does," he declares on "How Soon Is Now?"—a hit single that was tacked on to the new album for its U.S. release. It's a statement that's at once defiant and needful, and Marr reinforces it by alternating reverb with a soaring guitar line that slices through the dreamily languid tune.

The album itself offers little of the erotic anomie of its predecessor, *The Smiths*. While that first album was mainly about love—specifically,

Frank Rose is a contributing editor of Esquire.

SONG

Now I am calm. It seems that nothing
can make me feel the same exhausting pain.

What is another's harrowing to me?
Grief is not a lake,

I am miles at sea, miles
from the moving figures—

Why are they calling out?
They cluster at land's edge as though

the stony promontory,
where they had just been standing,

were sheared away.
If they are frightened,

if they also grieve,
let them comfort one another,

I cannot help them, I am riding
each enormous wave of this absence

that knows no further shore.

Ellen Bryant Voigt

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about homosexual longing and heterosexual aversion—on *Meat Is Murder* Morrissey seems more the defiant rebel than the hopeless romantic. In songs like "Barbarism Begins at Home" and "The Headmaster Ritual," he lashes out at families and schools and other purveyors of officially sanctioned violence against children. He saves his greatest outrage, however, for the butcher shop. "Meat Is Murder" may seem a bit avant-garde for America, but in Britain, where radical vegetarians are championing animal rights with all the fervor displayed by antiabortionists here, it's quite a timely polemic. Unfortunately, Morrissey makes a better masochist than he does a moralist, and "Meat Is Murder," despite a chilling tune and a nice performance by some bleating cattle, is neither subtle nor particularly convincing.

Morrissey himself, on the other hand, is both: an intense young man with shock-treatment hair and a knowing way. In concert this June in New York he was very much the dominant presence, a gamin figure, fey, animated, infinitely self-assured. He danced across the stage in a virtual fit, and though he hid his face behing his sleeve he exposed his breast like a martyr searching for an arrow. Only one question remains: If he's so shy, how come he's such an engaging performer? I'm afraid I have no easy answer for that one, except to suggest that this is not the kind of behavior that pays off in job interviews. □

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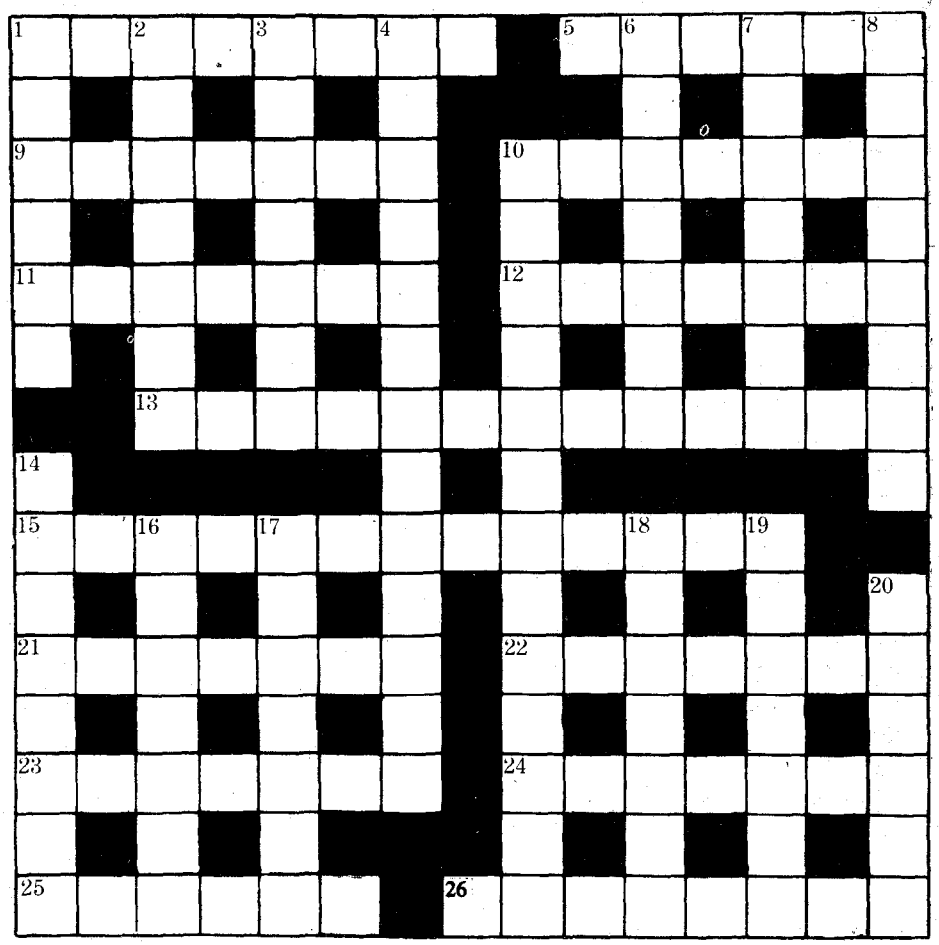

ACROSS

1 What subs used as a way to make clean habits. (8)
5 A poor golfer seems very loud and sort of rude around it. (6)
9 Cancer by another name, though highly regarded by some. (3,4)
10 What one might consider a tenderhearted radical is still only relative. (7)
11 A system of rules, but after playing, one shouldn't leave things this way. (7)
12 The relative price of eggs and salt, perhaps. (7)
13 Do coach stands furnish drink? (That's what one might do with rumors, and something to settle the stomach.) (6,3,4)
15 Would this illustrate a nonpartisan approach? (They say one might be waved there.) (7,6)
21 Dug in, possibly, after the old system of transportation revealed a means of escape. (7)
22 Have equal billing with a number, like a large English apple. (7)
23 Ever dip a sort of this to keep someone else from getting something? (7)
24 What our country planners hoped to be doing with several states? (7)
25 Cut in two pieces, some people put caraway here. (6)
26 What might be cracked only once comes back in such as appear in pictures. (One might see reels of it!) (8)

DOWN

1 Dug out of the snow, at the order of the doctor? (Sounds as though homes might be described by him). . . (6)
2 . . . . . while these go over the snow, or possibly strike something heavy. (7)
3 Found in Canada, or in a well-known ranger's companion. (7)
4 You have chills and fever, but could still feel swell with it! (7,6)
6 Possibly found nude but not inside, therefore not seen. (7)
7 One should find a rag for making a hodgepodge of a hodgepodge. (7)
8 Color not exactly cared for—arbor vitae. (3,5)
10 Do they pay it in their spring, in the spring —or do they not give one a fair trial here? (8,5)
14 Not a favorite place to look for the bottom of the roll. (8)
16 One takes over the purse, possibly, in place of Abraham. (7)
17 In flight, it might be strategically placed to prevent accidents. (7)
18 I'd get away from indigents, sort of, settling in at home. (7)
19 Honest-to-goodness size, except for the head, as you might discover. (7)
20 Publicity takes time, according to such sayings. (6)

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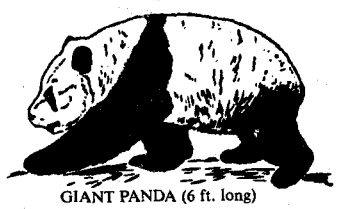

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